

 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

48 Hours in Lisbon

NEW VIBE IN PORTUGAL

Pg. 28

TRAVELER

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Return to **VENICE**

UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES
OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST
MASQUERADE

The Buzz in Mexico

SWEET LIFE IN THE
RIVIERA MAYA

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Island of Zen

EXPLORING
JAPAN'S SHIKOKU

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Adventure in Africa

A DAD AND HIS
TEEN IN TANZANIA

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[**ABBEEY ROAD**] IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE BEATLES

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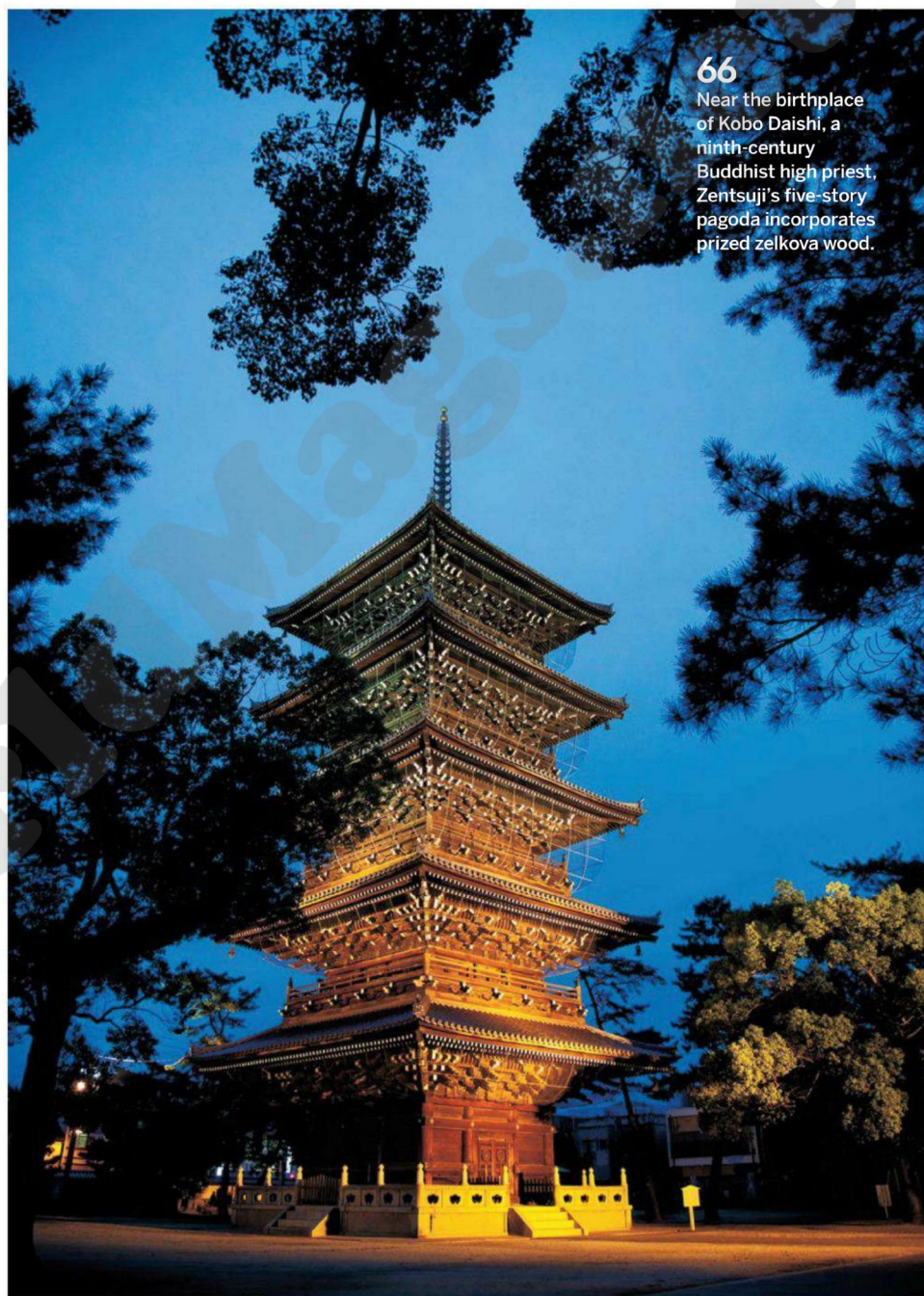
Lions hunt buffalo, a father reconnects with his teen daughter—the circle of life unfolds in Tanzania.

Story by MARK JENKINS



On the Cover:

A boat plies Venice's Grand Canal toward La Salute church. Story on page 44. Photograph by Franco Cogoli/SIME.

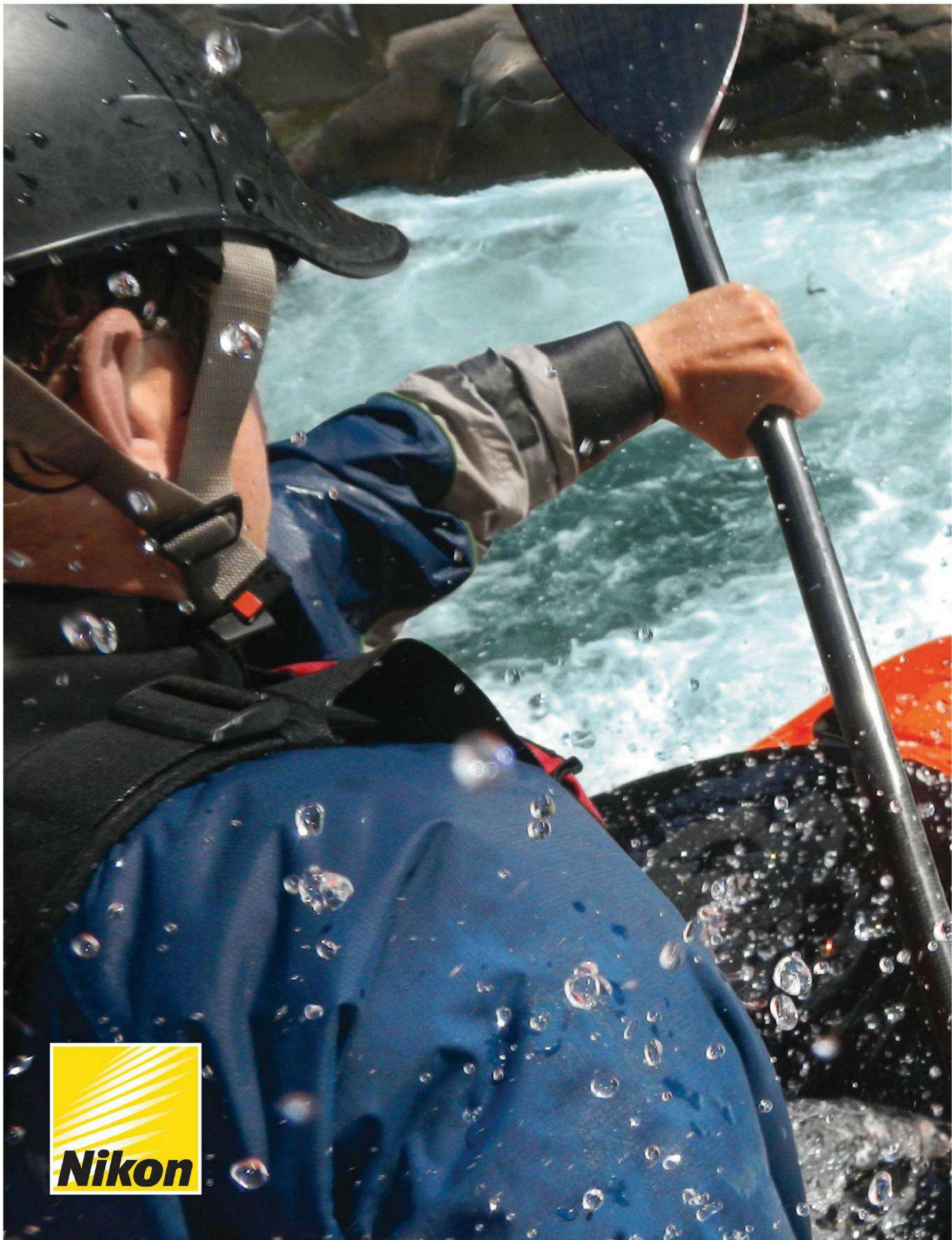


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Near the birthplace of Kobo Daishi, a ninth-century Buddhist high priest, Zentsuji's five-story pagoda incorporates prized zelkova wood.



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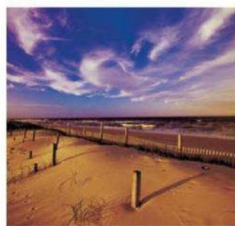


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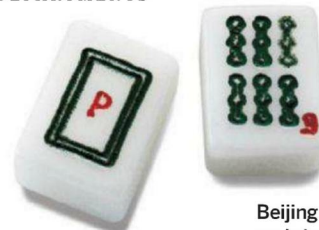
“His face takes on a wild flashback kind of expression, which has me worried he will try to recapture lost youth with one final grand decapitation—mine.” —Unbound, page 14



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Fans pay tribute to the Beatles at London’s famous Abbey Road crossing.

DEPARTMENTS



Beijing mah-jongg.

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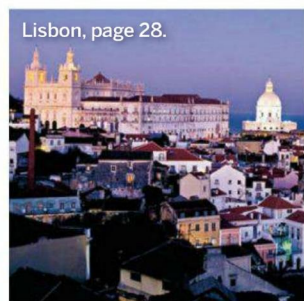
Getting by with a little help from expatriates in **Beijing, Cairo, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan**... 48 hours in **Lisbon**... **New England** ski chalets... Adventures in snowy landscapes... Authentic B&Bs on **Hawaii’s Big Island**... Hotel deals in historic **Montreal**... New afternoon-tea trends in **England**... **North American** winter carnivals for the whole family... **Hong Kong** with kids... Port of call: **Martinique**... **South African** road trip... Crossing **London’s Abbey Road** in Fab Four style.

82 The Short List

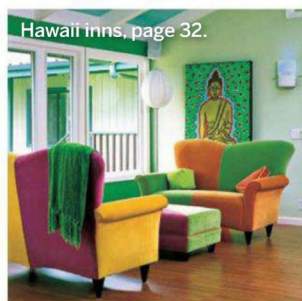
Hot dates and noteworthy happenings around the globe.

88 Your Shot/Travel

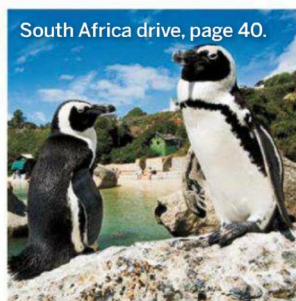
On a frozen lake in Sweden, there are miles to go before these sled dogs sleep.



Lisbon, page 28.



Hawaii inns, page 32.



South Africa drive, page 40.

Where’s Andrew? Our digital nomad, Andrew Evans, tweets his travels. While in Louisiana, he dodged bayou vipers and crocs, followed jubilant parades near Jackson Square (right) in New Orleans, sat in on a Cajun jam session, and spent a sleepless night in a haunted mansion. Follow his path on Twitter @WheresAndrew.



New Orleans.

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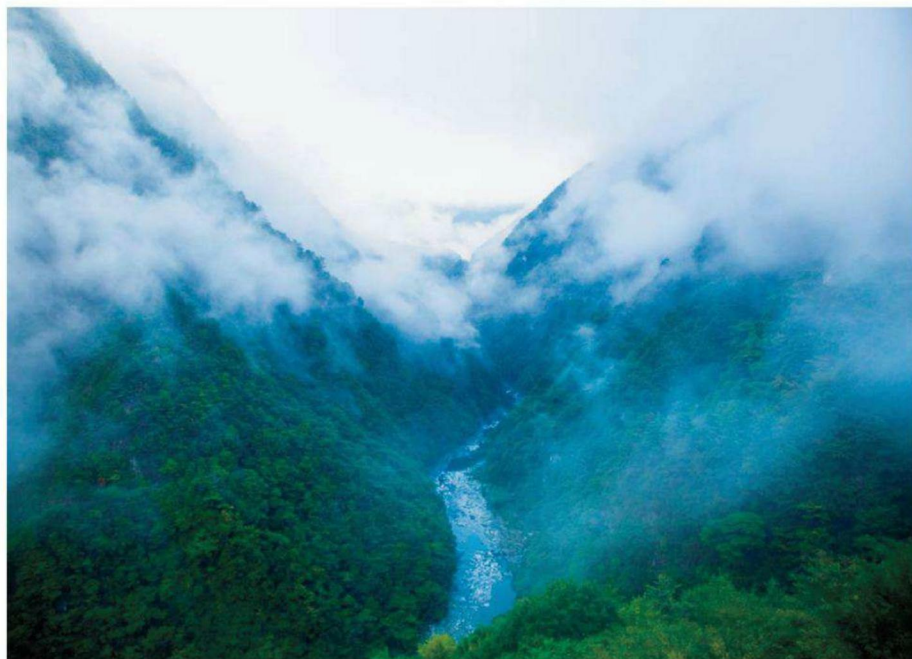
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Through the fog: Much of Japan, such as misty Iya Valley, emerged from 2011's disasters unscathed.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Comeback Nation

DATELINE: MARCH 11, 2011, off Japan's main island of Honshu.

A magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck, generating a devastating tsunami that wiped out entire towns along the country's Pacific coast; the dual disasters caused partial meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The media painted a picture of a nation in ruins, shrouded in a nuclear pall. Predictably, tourism cratered.

Now, close to a year later, some news stories have revisited the country, but the negative perception lingers. This is typical of the media—to provide immediate tragedy coverage whose effect is felt long after the actual event. It happened after Hurricane Katrina and the Bali bombings, too. I think that's irresponsible. Not to report on repair and restoration misses a good—albeit not sensational—story and deeply damages a destination's local economy. Japan has rebuilt large parts of the affected areas, but people have still

stayed away in droves. By April 2011, the number of international visitors had declined 62.5 percent compared with April 2010; by August it was still down 32 percent from the previous August.

Now, all of this poses an advantage for travelers. It will cost less to visit Japan in the near future. And you'll find major tourist attractions such as Kyoto's Ryoanji Temple and its exquisite Zen rock garden providing rare crowd-free tranquillity.



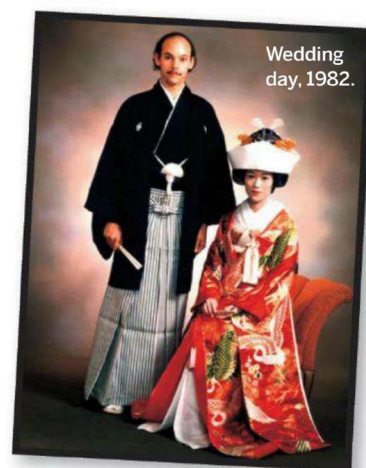
So now is the time to visit Japan. We're delighted to share Don George's account (page 66) of his travels around the island of Shikoku, a pastoral throwback to the old Japan. Andrew Evans's Digital Nomad posts (digital.nomad.nationalgeographic.com) offer more impressions of the country. Both writers describe an eminently visitable Japan. That's the largely unrealized news opportunity: to return to a place of tragedy and report on how it has come back, and why you should, too. —*Keith Bellows*

BACKSTORY

Say Yes to the Ceremonial Dress

In this issue's feature "Japan's Past Perfect" (page 66), editor at large Don George revisits the family home of his wife, Kuniko, on the old-country island of Shikoku where her parents still live.

Nearly 30 years ago, the couple married on this island in a Shinto ceremony dressed in traditional wedding finery (*below*). "Kuniko's multilayered, exquisite silk kimono cost more than \$1,300 to rent—in 1982," George says. "The tassel on her dress is actually the end of a ceremonial dagger." George donned a kimono, too, which he describes as a "thrilling" experience. "Putting on the crisp, time-honored garment deeply reaffirmed the symbolism of the ceremony—and our cross-cultural marriage."



Wedding day, 1982.

The hardest part, he says, was holding the customary somber pose. "I was feeling pretty giddy, but I did my best to imitate Richard Chamberlain in *Shogun*."

When George set out to report the piece, he worried he wouldn't be moved by the same places his in-laws cherish. "Happily, that wasn't the case," he says. "By asking about 'their' Shikoku, I got to see the island through their eyes."

His biggest surprise? "How little things have changed: The pace, the expanses of pristine land, and the open-hearted hospitality are all just as I remember them from my first visit."

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Will Travel for Food

OUR DEBUT TASTE OF TRAVEL special issue (October 2011) taught us that the only thing bigger than our readers' appetite for traveling is... their appetite for eating. "Food is one of the reasons—if not *the* reason—to travel and explore. So much of culture is food," wrote **Cindy Lin** of Perth Amboy, N.J. "I wanted to lick the colorful pages," added **Joseph Chiba** of Honolulu. "Food is the ultimate social medium—nothing can bring people together like it. Thank goodness for that one common ground."



Pass the plate: San Sebastián, Spain, excels in *pintxos*, Basque-style tapas.

Our "Foodways" map of seven American food trails inspired **Eric Carlson** of Philadelphia to explore Pennsylvania's "Pretzel Corner." He called one of our suggestions "off base" but offered his own pick, Deitsch Eck, for "local, authentic" Amish food on Old Route 22.

Though we highlighted Spanish specialties such as *horchata* and ham-filled trout, **Francisco Aguirre** of Miami thought his favorite culinary hot spot deserved more love: "In *Restaurant* magazine's rankings of the world's 50 best restaurants, Spain claims five, with four near San Sebastián. Yet you didn't mention world-famous Basque cuisine."

In "Dawn's Early Bite," we presented photos of meals that start the day around the world. "The traditional Filipino breakfast is delicious and hearty. However, *tapsilog* is not the correct caption," notes **Charlynn Bowsher** of Chicago. "Its name an acronym for its components, the dish includes *sinangag* (garlic fried rice) and *ilog* (egg). Your picture shows *longanisa* (sausage), so the proper term is *longsilog*."

Animal lovers expressed displeasure over a few featured dishes. **Lynda Austin**, a vegetarian from Orange, Calif., found a photo of a roasted pig ("A Culinary Thrilla in Manila") unsavory. In "Cravings," ten chefs and foodies

TWEET OF THE MONTH

"The cover photo on the October @NatGeoTraveler of an outdoor dinner at a winery—the gorgeous pic you want to walk into? Love that it's Oregon."

—Jessica, *WhyGo Italy*, @italylogue

shared their favorite travel eats. **Lynn Learch** of Watsonville, Calif., called our decision to include Canadian-style foie gras "intolerable." **Deb Kidwell**, a donkey farmer in Martin, Tenn., wrote: "I am not against others in the world following their customs, but I was disappointed to see an American chef [Art Smith] promote the eating of donkey meat, particularly considering the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy lists the American mammoth jackstock as 'threatened.'"

Chef Art Smith responds: "When in China... one does what the Chinese do! But when in Jasper, Fla., home to my family's hundred-year-old farm, donkeys are beloved pets. My parents own a pair of feral rescue donkeys, an anniversary gift from my father to my mother over ten years ago. The donkeys have produced many offspring; none ever became dinner."

Diploma, Meet Passport

"Speaking in Tongues" (Smart Traveler, September 2011) got readers speaking in superlatives about educational family trips abroad. "Language immersion programs seem perfect not only for teaching the language but also enlightening students/travelers about the culture," writes **Tiffany Stahlbaum** of Huntingtown, Md., who has lived in Europe with her four daughters.



Shore Is a Hot Topic

Columnist Costas Christ challenged the cruise industry in October 2011's Tales From the Frontier. That same month, the New York-based World Monuments Fund echoed our concerns, placing Charleston's historic district on its watch list of threatened heritage sites.

Of course, the effects of cruise tourism ripple globally. **Ellen Frankel** of New York City writes about a recent vacation in St. John, U.S.V.I.: "Friends were snorkeling in a spot filled with rare specimens when a cruise ship came close to shore, seeming to pay no heed to those in its wake."



YOUR TURN

Where is your perfect beach? Tell us: We'll publish a few on this page.

Send an e-mail to TravelTalk@ngs.org. See page 23 for Costas Christ's favorite beaches.

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Tiger sighting in Corbett National Park

The Jazz of Travel

Improvisation on the road, though risky, brings surprising rewards

IT'S SEPTEMBER, SUNDAY, SUNNY. I'm alone at an outdoor café in the Pest part of Budapest. Arranged around my table are the essential elements for an afternoon's contentment: a glass of wine, a slice of Sacher torte, a map, a railway timetable. On the street, a violinist plays one of Bartók's Gypsy melodies. The vibrato from his violin feels as if it is penetrating my heart. ¶ No, I'm not turning sappy; I'm savoring the perfect happiness that always overcomes me at a moment like this, when I'm fully immersed in travel.

I'm riding the rails in eastern Europe, on my way to Istanbul. I have never been there, and I can't wait to see it. This afternoon, though, I have to figure out where I go from Budapest. I consult the map and timetable, and weigh my options: I could take an overnight train that runs east through Hungary into Romania, then south to Romania's capital, Bucharest. Or I can take a train that runs south, through Serbia, then cuts to the east and drops me in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. Both routes sound wonderful; both set me up equally well for that final train leg to Istanbul.

So then, shall it be Bulgaria or Romania? I am pondering this with my map spread out in front of me like a tablecloth when the man at the next table calls over.

"Where are you going?" he asks, in New York-accented English. The accent is a surprise; he looks so European with his mustache, shaggy hair, and well-worn tweed jacket.

"I don't know," I answer, laughing. "Are you from around here?"

"I'm Hungarian," he replies. "But I lived in Queens 25 years. Now I'm back in Budapest. I do business and travel around the region."

Well then, I say, maybe you can help me out. I explain my dilemma.

"Bucharest!" He shakes his head. "You will not like Bucharest." I'm a little shocked by his reaction. I press him for specifics.

"You go into the wrong neighborhood, could have trouble. But you're from New York, so maybe you'll be fine. Tell you what, I have an office there, I will give you my secretary's number."

He hands me his business card.

"Take this. When you get off the train in Bucharest, have a look



A track less taken: Quick choices—this train, not that—can define a trip.

A great trip is like a terrific jazz solo. Musicians weave magic by making unexpected, playful choices in real time.

around. You don't like what you see, just take the next train out. You have trouble, call my office." Then he shakes my hand, pays his bill, and leaves.

I sit holding his card, frozen with indecision. My moment of travel bliss has just evaporated; I'm feeling pulled right and left. Thanks to this random encounter, I now have a helpful contact and a backup strategy, both useful resources when you head to an unfamiliar city. However, the Hungarian gentleman's take on Bucharest has unsettled me.

Tonight I'll get on a train, but which? I take a deep breath, close

my eyes, and do what I always do when faced with a difficult travel choice: I listen hard to music playing inside my head and try to tap into my travel rhythm.

I was a musician long before I ever traveled, and the skills I learned as a singer, especially improvising with phrasing and melody, have served me well on my travels. This is because a truly great trip is like a terrific jazz solo. Jazz musicians weave magic by making unexpected, playful choices in real time. And on a good trip, when my travel rhythms are "cooking," I'm improvising too.

Traveling, when you think about it, is based on a series of decisions. Most of the major ones get settled before we leave home—where to go, how long we will stay, what our budget is, and so on. That's our struc-

ture. But once we're actually in a place, we make a neverending series of little choices that transform our experience. At the end of the boulevard, we may turn right or left. We may speak, or not speak, to that interesting-looking stranger. We can sit down at that little café or pass it by and try the next one around the block. Trip planning is the rehearsal, travel the performance. Every small choice that we make on the road changes our

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Here's to CLASSIC ONION RINGS



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Going Head to Head

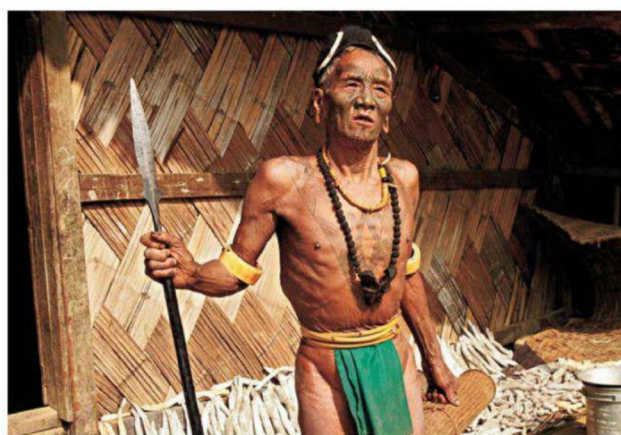
In India's Nagaland, aging fighters recall ruthless victory rites of yesteryear

HAVE YOU EVER CONVERSED with someone who is getting on in years, someone who has torn so many pages off the calendar that his recent history is a blur, rendering him barely able to remember what he had for breakfast that morning? But, when you ask him about the good old days, instantly the years dissolve, clarity returns, and he begins recounting some memorable event from his youth in vivid detail, faster than you can say “geriatric time machine”? That very scenario is the cause of my current dilemma.

I’m speaking with Lanang, a Naga who says he may be 90 but he’s not sure. When I ask about his headhunter days, however, I suddenly become a prop in an enthusiastic reenactment of tribal warfare. Lanang goes into full warrior mode, jumping around in a loincloth and stabbing the air in front of my chest with his spear—the same spear he used to kill three enemies in long-ago battles. He then shows me the machete he used to cut off their heads. Lanang was the real deal, a headhunter in Nagaland, a state in northeast India.

I’ve wanted to visit Nagaland for decades, ever since I heard stories about the tribal people who lived in this isolated, mountainous area of the country. But a strong separatist movement among the Naga people had made the region off limits: The Indian government wanted to both contain the struggle and keep outsiders from the conflict. About the only way to get an entry visa was to be a Baptist missionary. My take is that the government reasoned the missionaries could help persuade the headhunters to settle their disputes with something other than sharp machetes and spears.

Recently, India has been opening Nagaland to tourists. By the time I arrive, in 2010, it’s clear the missionaries have done their job well. There is a Baptist church in nearly every village I visit. More than 90 percent of local people report they are Christians, and most of those say they are Baptist, likely making Nagaland the most Baptist state in the world. That’s right: There may be a higher percentage of Baptists among the former headhunters of Nagaland than in the state of Mississippi. That doesn’t mean, however, that visiting Nagaland is anything like going to Mississippi, or anywhere else in the United States. Nagaland is still closer to what it has been than to what it will



Past life: A tattooed Naga elder dons typical warrior garb, spear and all.

Lanang goes into full warrior mode, jumping around and stabbing the air in front of my chest with his spear.

typically geometric patterns, than your average NBA multimillionaire. But it’s the face ink that really gets your attention, a mask of invincibility that says you’re staring at trouble. To me it also says, “That really had to hurt.”

So I ask Lanang, “Was the tattooing painful? Did you flinch?” My untattooed interpreter begins to answer without relaying the question. “He was a great warrior; it didn’t bother...” Interrupting his speculation, I say, “I want to hear Lanang’s answer.” I expect the years will have eliminated any bravado, and sure enough,

become; it’s still exotic to Western eyes. Here people do farmwork by hand. Women carry clay pots filled with burning coals so they can make a fire. In remote villages men sit around smoking opium.

The Naga weren’t cannibals and didn’t shrink heads. They were warriors who believed that the best way to win battles with neighboring tribes was to have a good offense. And what could be more offensive than cutting off your enemy’s head, then displaying it in your village?

The Naga ended headhunting in the early 1960s, but I wonder

if Lanang knows what decade it is now. During his impromptu performance, his face takes on a wild flashback kind of expression, which has me worried he will try to recapture lost youth with one final grand decapitation—mine. Fortunately, my playful expressions of terror elicit a smile from him and remind him that we’re just joking around.

Naga warriors look like people you wouldn’t want to mess with, even when they’re not carrying spears or machetes. They often wear accessories, including necklaces and nose decorations made from animal tusks, teeth, and claws, which suggest some death-defying struggle with ferocious wild creatures. They add to the intimidating aura by wearing more tattoos,

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Lanang's laughter tells me I'm about to hear the truth.

"It was very painful," he answers. "They dipped a barb in pigment and then hammered the point into my skin. The process took two weeks, and each day I thought I was going to die." Not surprisingly, face tattooing, like headhunting, is a tradition no longer practiced.

From Lanang's house we hike up a steep road to the highest point in the village of Longwa. Here, on the crest of the mountain, right smack on the national border, sits the longhouse of the chief, or *angh*. We enter through the front door, which is in India, and shake hands with Angh Ngo Wang in a room that lies in Myanmar (Burma). National borders don't mean much to these members of the Konyak subtribe, who have relatives in both countries. Angh Wang squats near a fire on the dirt floor. His necklace sports five small brass heads representing, he tells me, the five heads his father and grandfather took during battles to defend their village.

"Where are those skulls today?" I ask.

"Under the floor of our meeting house, where we buried all of the skulls after we became Christians." It's a response that I'll hear repeatedly in this tribal area. In only

three villages do I actually see the skulls, the evidence of Nagaland's violent history.

In the last village that I visit, I talk with another former headhunter, then return to our vehicle. That's when I hear a familiar sound coming from a small hut. Not quite believing my ears, I ask my guide, "What is that music?"

"Do you happen to know the Gaither Vocal Band?"

"Yes, I do," I reply. Bill Gaither's group comes out of the Southern gospel tradition, playing music you might hear on a Sunday morning in small-town Mississippi. But hearing it on a Thursday morning in a village in remote Nagaland is a bit surprising. "The Gaither Vocal Band is very popular in Nagaland," my guide explains. Gospel music and headhunters in the same village? What's next?

In Nagaland you can still find a few men who were fierce headhunters. You can take their pictures, talk with them about the old traditions, and walk away with your own head still safely on your shoulders. But you may want to hurry. Changes are under way. ■

Contributing Editor BOYD MATSON hosts *National Geographic Weekend* on radio.

REAL TRAVEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

travel melody, shapes it into a song that is ours, and ours alone.

This all happens in a split second. Life, like music, doesn't pause while you plan your solo. It can be scary to improvise our own travel riffs. There always is some risk, from the trivial (ending up in a boring or unpleasant place) to the serious (getting into an unsafe situation).

Perhaps the worst risk, in the long run, is regret. Some years ago I rode down the Amazon River in Brazil on a public boat out of Manaus. We left at sunset; by nighttime all of the Brazilian passengers on the boat were dancing on the top deck, under the clear stars of a jungle sky. A girl named Patricia handed me a beer and asked, "Are you going to Parintins, too?" I had never even heard of Parintins. She told me the story of the river town, which every year attracts thousands with its massive carnival on the Amazon. There would be days of parades, dancing, and nonstop music. Patricia urged me to get off the boat with the crowd in the morning. I could stay on the floor of her sister's place, she assured me.

I did not get much sleep that night.

Patricia's invitation sounded wonderful, yet something inside of me hesitated. I was really enjoying the quiet flow of the boat cruise. If I got off, I mused, perhaps I wouldn't find another riverboat as nice as this one on which to continue my journey down the Amazon. So when the boat docked at Parintins in the morning, I followed my internal travel rhythm and remained on board. I still wonder how the song would have come out if I'd played the other solo.

In the years since I passed up the carnival in Parintins, I've made thousands of travel choices, both big and small. Practice makes perfect—and the more you play the jazz of travel, the better you become at it. I'm still no John Coltrane, but I do feel a lot more confident when I'm improvising my travel tunes.

The musician in the café packs up his violin and departs. I pay my check and leave too. His performance is over; mine will end in Istanbul. In the meantime, I have a solo to play. I hum a few bars, head for the train station, and go. ■

Contributing editor DAISANN McLANE tweets from her travels. You can follow her on Twitter: @Daisann_McLane.



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Point of No Return

Loyalty programs are complicated and confusing. Should you even bother?

IT USED TO BE so simple. ¶ If you belonged to a loyalty program, you'd get a point for every mile flown. Collect enough of 'em and you'd qualify for a round-trip ticket. The same formula worked for hotels and rental cars. ¶ But today you can score miles without darkening the door of an aircraft, hotel, or rental car. Buy a box of cereal? Ka-ching! Talk on a cell phone? More miles. Get a mortgage? Even more! Unfortunately, the "free" ticket comes with a bundle of restrictions, including blackout and expiration dates, and extra charges

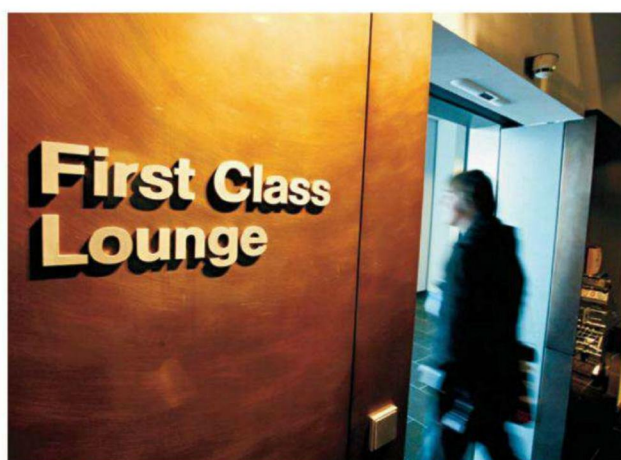
or higher minimums to fly on more desirable dates.

For all but the most skilled mileage collector (think of George Clooney's character in the movie *Up in the Air*), loyalty programs have become an unwinnable game. Every day a reader complains to me about the unavailability of reward seats or the ever shifting landscape of elite-level requirements and expiration dates. Still, last year, Americans maintained 2.1 billion loyalty program memberships and accumulated approximately \$48 billion in points and miles. Why do we play the game?

It didn't start out this way: When American Airlines offered the first mileage-based rewards program in 1981, it wanted to reward its frequent customers and generate loyalty to the company—a mutually beneficial compact. Back then, airlines attracted customers the old-fashioned way: with good service and competitive prices.

Within a few weeks of AAdvantage's launch, United unveiled its own frequent flier program, followed by TWA and Delta. Plans in those early years were simple and straightforward: On many airlines you could get a coach ticket for 20,000 miles with no expiration dates.

But the debut of rewards programs coincided with the deregulation of the airline industry, which led to a shift away from service as a selling point. Cheap fares moved most of the tickets. Along the way, loyalty programs changed too. Mileage expirations were introduced by United in 1988 and quickly spread. American also pioneered "elite" levels, which further segmented air travelers, according to Tim Winship, who publishes *Frequent Flier.com*. "It gradually dawned on the airlines that the programs were potential generators of revenue," he says.



Want in? This door is closed to the majority of mileage collectors.

The rewards are contained behind growing walls of elite and super-elite status, available to only a chosen few.

super-elite status, available to only a chosen few.

We rarely have a chance to see how much money the programs generate, but occasionally we're afforded a glimpse into the workings of the engines driving the loyalty economy. In 2005, for example, Air Canada spun off its Aeroplan frequent flier program in a \$250 million stock offering. And a survey by IdeaWorks estimated the annual value of United's program at an eye-popping \$3 billion. That's about \$33 per member.

While companies have benefited from our loyalty, we've become mile-addicted junkies hooked on the largely empty promise of a free flight, more legroom, or extra-special upgrades. I've watched otherwise

rational travelers do insane things, such as book flights on an airline when there were cheaper alternatives (particularly when their company was footing the bill), fly somewhere they didn't really have to go, or make a purchase "for the miles."

I myself have fallen into the trap. In a misguided attempt to reach my preferred airline's coveted "elite" status, I found myself obsessively collecting miles without regard for the value of my collection. My efforts included flying from

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Above: A Zodiac sprays wake as it skims toward the shores of Svalbard.

The New Philanthropist

Globe-trotter Erin Michelson's good deeds go beyond gifts of soccer balls and art supplies

ERIN MICHELSON IS going places. The business consultant (recently based in San Francisco) and self-described “adventure philanthropist” set out on December 31, 2010, on a two-year journey to more than 70 countries on all seven continents. Along the way, she is donating time and money to humanitarian causes—including, so far, impoverished communities in Uganda, HIV/AIDS organizations in Ethiopia, and housing initiatives in the Philippines—and connecting with local communities in ways that casual tourists can’t. Michelson, who chronicles her adventures at *GoErinGo.com*, says the journey is enriching her life, leading to a “more engaged existence and new depths of happiness.” *Traveler* interviewed Michelson by phone during her stay in Beirut, Lebanon.

What is adventure philanthropy? It’s a lifestyle, making giving part of your life and your travels. For me, it began during a hiking tour in the Usambara Mountains of Tanzania. Heading to a remote school, our group was advised to bring paper and pencils as a gift. Instead, we brought soccer balls, musical instruments, and art supplies, thinking these would be more fun for the kids. When we reached the school, we discovered 700 students crowded five to a desk with no books or pencils. The principal literally had ten sheets of paper in his desk. He was completely gracious about our gifts, but we realized we had made a mistake. To set things right, we bought lumber with which the students’ parents built new desks and chairs for the school. That sparked the idea that, when traveling, you can better understand people by getting involved in their community and its needs.

And “Erin Goes Global” followed? Yes. It’s a two-year sabbatical from my business during which I’m traveling the world, volunteering with various organizations, having amazing experiences, and hopefully, doing some good along the way. As a professional fund-raiser, I’m connecting philanthropic groups I encounter to funders in the U.S., in part through my website. There, people can get involved and learn that philanthropy can be fun. There’s a tool on the website called Donate My Dollars, where visitors can vote on where I give money. Most of the local organizations I get involved with focus on women, children, and poverty.

ERIN MICHELSON VOLUNTEER FUND-RAISER

Michelson grew up in the western U.S. and has lived in New Zealand, China, and South Africa. After working for numerous financial firms, she started her own consulting group. She founded the Alliance for Women’s Equality and worked with Habitat for Humanity and other charitable groups before finding ways to combine philanthropy with her love of travel.

What kind of reaction are you getting? It’s been very positive. I connected to a great organization in the Philippines that was suggested by someone online. I stayed for three days on the island of Culion, site of a former leper colony. I talked with locals and learned about the state of Hansen’s disease in the world today. More people are sending ideas about where I should go. This has been a help, because I’m not a big travel planner. I just kind of show up.

Did you single out specific projects before you left? Definitely. One is called Drop in the Bucket, a group that builds village wells in Africa. I’ll be working with them in Uganda, Tanzania, or South Sudan, depending on how the vote goes. I’ll spend a month there, embedded with the community, filming the building of the well and interviewing the villagers about the project. The organization does great work bringing water to villages.

Have you found any local heroes? Yes. I just spent the afternoon with Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly from an organization here in Beirut called Baladi History and Nature. It is working to preserve the



Wander woman: On Mozambique’s Tofo Beach, Erin Michelson holds a spear to tag sharks.

KATE STEPHENS/MARINE MEGA FAUNA

Sheep's Crossing, White Mountains

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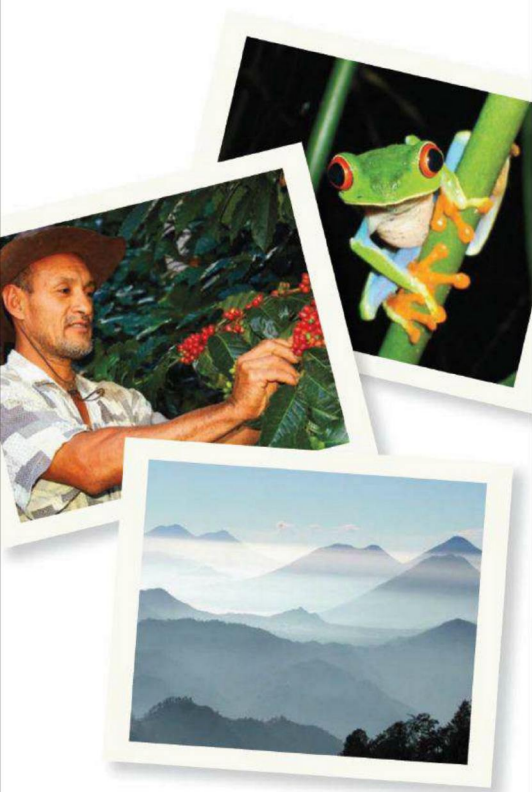


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cultural history of Lebanon. Atuki Turner founded an organization in Uganda in the small village of Tororo, working on issues of children's rights and women's rights. And in Israel, I'll be working with Yudit Sidikman, whose organization provides self-defense training for young girls in conflict areas.

You travel mostly alone, right? Yes. Traveling solo, you get much more involved in the community and are more open to talking to people and having more experiences.

Any surprises along the way? I think Southeast Asia has increasingly become a safe place to travel. I was surprised at how open, friendly, and helpful the people were. I've also been surprised and encouraged by the availability of local guides and home stays, which provide a more textured experience than hotels do.

Any disappointments? I've endured times of discomfort, and yet those can provide the best experiences. During a three-day kayaking trip in New Zealand's Fiordland National Park, it stormed the whole time. We could never reach our landing beaches

and had to camp in miserable places, but that's where we saw the most incredible wildlife. It's as if you have to pay your dues. I was just at a jungle wildlife sanctuary in Laos, where there were leeches and bugs, but spending time with elephants, including washing them and walking with them, was fantastic.

Have you ever felt threatened while you were traveling? I've been mugged a couple of times in other places. I was kidnapped a long time ago in Vietnam, but I got away. Luckily, I've never been seriously hurt. Before leaving the States for this trip, I took a three-day self-defense class. The physical training was one of the most empowering experiences of my life. I was so enthusiastic about the program that I decided to give scholarships so two other women could participate.

What next? I'm writing a book called *The Adventure Philanthropist*. It will highlight not just my stories but also those of others who are living passionately and changing the world in their own ways. ■

Keith Bellows is the editor-in-chief of *Traveler*.

THE INSIDER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

New York to Anchorage primarily to qualify for elite status.

I could also point to the rise of online forums and blogs dedicated to helping travelers maximize miles as evidence of our collective delusion (read the conversation threads on Flyertalk.com or the blogs on BoardingArea.com if you doubt me). These hangouts for hard-core frequent fliers are often a breeding ground for entitled elites and wannabes, who trade tips on how to work a corrupt and corrupting system. It should bother all of us that loyalty programs have created what travel agent Blake Fleetwood calls "a new class system" in which a select few enjoy free flights, luxury rooms, upgrades to first and business class, red-carpet check-in lines, and early boarding. At the same time, airlines take increasingly more from the non-elites (adding fees for checking luggage and for snacks, for example) in a process that is euphemistically called "unbundling."

A product like this ought to come with a warning label. Some experts have estimated the value of a mile to be somewhere between one and two cents, but I'd posit that miles have negative value—that is, participating in the program can cost you real

money. Your points don't even belong to you: According to the conditions of most programs, they're the airline's property. And the terms can be changed at any time, for any reason. Loyalty goes only in one direction, apparently.

Is there a way out? Sure. It starts and ends with you—the consumer—making purchases based on common sense, not miles. If you're booking travel for the loyalty points, you're missing the point. The winner isn't the traveler with the most points; it's the airline or hotel. Odds are you won't be able to redeem the points the way you want to. There's a very good chance they'll expire before you can do anything with them. But your money, ah, your money—the company gets to keep that.

For many of us, the solution would be to cut up the frequent flier affinity credit card. Book the plane ticket with the best connection and the lowest fare. Reserve a room at the hotel that's in the best location. Government regulation of mileage programs? It's been tried. It's—sorry about the pun—pointless. No, you have to regulate your own behavior. So, kick the habit, now. ■

Editor at large CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT also addresses readers' travel problems. E-mail your story to cellott@ngs.org.

The Beach Report

The news isn't good for the world's beaches, but there are bright spots in unlikely places

I NEVER WATCH the cable TV series *Jersey Shore*, filmed in Seaside Heights, the beach town where I grew up. Well, almost never. I do admit to tuning in to an episode where an intoxicated Snooki is strutting along the boardwalk and stops to ask a baffled tourist, "Where's the beach?"—which is just a few feet away. It was funny, and it fed right into the stereotypes we locals had about the visitors (big-haired "Jersey" girls and their guys in muscle tees) who came to our barrier island on summer weekends. Yet Snooki probably

had no idea that she was asking the same question many coastal zone scientists are asking about sands from Florida to Australia.

When I was in high school, I had a summer job cleaning the beach; I got up at dawn each day to collect the garbage that had washed ashore. I noticed that the beach seemed to be shrinking. Each passing year also brought more garbage, leading me to wonder if a pristine beach existed anywhere. So at 19 years old, with a surfboard under my arm, I set out on a 'round-the-world journey to find the perfect beach.

It was the beginning of a quest that stretched across two decades, dozens of miles of white, black, and pink sand, and more than 100 countries. I found what I was looking for (more on that later), but I also discovered that the beach—the very definition of a vacation for many travelers—was becoming an endangered species. Today, beaches are threatened by climate change, pollution, and overdevelopment.

"Most beachgoers see only the surface of the water, rarely venturing to look at what is below. Yet beneath the sea our coastal ecosystems are changing drastically," says Céline Cousteau, granddaughter of ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau and founder of Cause-Centric Productions, an organization dedicated to socio-environmental campaigns. "We are dependent in many ways upon these marine habitats, including for enjoyment when we go on a holiday. It is in our power to help protect them."

In the U.S., beaches remain a huge tourist attraction, with some 180 million vacationers hitting the coast annually, pumping \$260 billion into the economy and supporting more than 15 million jobs. Yet, the Natural Resources Defense Council reported that U.S. beach closings and advisories due to pollution soared to a total of 24,091 in 2010, the second highest number since the



There's no beach like home: New Jersey's Island Beach State Park.

**A big surprise
on my global
journey:
The more
far-flung
the beach,
the more
trash I actually
encountered.**

bottles and broken flip-flops heaped in piles. In the remote western Caribbean, a local fisherman deposited me on an uninhabited beach as beautiful as I have seen—except for the same plastic flotsam and jetsam lining the high-tide mark.

In some popular destinations, beaches are literally disappearing under our suntanned feet, as we destroy the life forms and topography that have kept them from washing away. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, illegal dumping of pollutants is killing the sea grasses and coral reefs while tourism construction is taking out the dunes and plants. Cancún became the poster child for disappearing beaches after bulldozing its dunes to put in big hotel foundations and ripping out vegetation to create its vacation-friendly stretches of white sand. In 2009, authorities used crime tape to cordon off an area in front of one hotel that was accused of building an illegal breakwater to hoard sand from other resorts in a desperate measure to deal with beach erosion.

"It was the chronicle of a disaster foretold," said Exequiel Ezcurra, the former head of Mexico's environmental agency, referring to Cancún's poorly planned coastal development during climate change talks in 2010. "Everybody knew this was going to

organization began monitoring 21 years ago. You'd think that saving beaches would be a top economic priority, in addition to an environmental one.

And this isn't just a domestic problem. One loose mass of floating garbage in the Pacific is reportedly the size of Texas. A big surprise on my global journey: The more far-flung the beach, the more trash I encountered. In the Andaman Islands, between India and Thailand, I paddled a dugout canoe across a stunning azure seascape to a slice of powdery white sand. I found plastic

happen. It had been predicted for 40 years.”

In Jamaica, Negril’s famous beach has been receding by as much as three feet a year, and on Hawaii’s Oahu, nearly a quarter of Waikiki beach is already gone compared with the 1920s. Similar reports are pouring in from around the world, though in some cases beach loss is a natural phenomenon.

There are people who aren’t standing idly by until the last grain disappears. The nonprofit Surfrider Foundation publishes a “State of the Beach” report that serves as a good resource on U.S. coastal states, Puerto Rico, and British Columbia while advocating for improved environmental policies. The Europe-based Blue Flag has certified beaches in 45 countries so far, including popular tourist spots such as the Côte d’Azur, France.

Some corporate entities are getting in on the action. Last January, in conjunction with Blue Flag, the producers of Corona Extra beer invited tourists to stay in a temporary five-bedroom hotel in Madrid made out of beach rubbish. The message: “This will be the future of our holidays if we do nothing to preserve our beaches.”

Travelers can also join the Ocean Conservancy and participate in its annual coastal cleanup. In 2010, 615,407 volunteers collected more than eight million pounds of beach trash worldwide (after the United States, the beach-blessed Philippines rallied the most volunteers).

My years of searching for the perfect beach yielded not one but several—Anse Lazio in the Seychelles; Polehale on Kauai, Hawaii; and Nihiwatu in Indonesia. There are others, but they are too fragile to handle the publicity. But after traversing six continents, my most unexpected discovery was a ten-mile swath of unblemished sand backed by undulating grass-covered dunes, perfect for digging in one’s toes: Island Beach State Park in New Jersey, about two miles from Seaside Heights.

Several good things occurred on that Jersey shore after my high school days, including a ban on pipeline chemical discharges just offshore, dune reclamation to prevent erosion, continued protected status, and growing public awareness to keep it clean. Today, Island Beach State Park, one of the last undeveloped shorelines on the eastern seaboard, looks much as it did when Henry Hudson saw it in 1609.

Turns out Snooki was not too far from the perfect beach. ■

Editor at large **COSTAS CHRIST** writes about sustainability issues.

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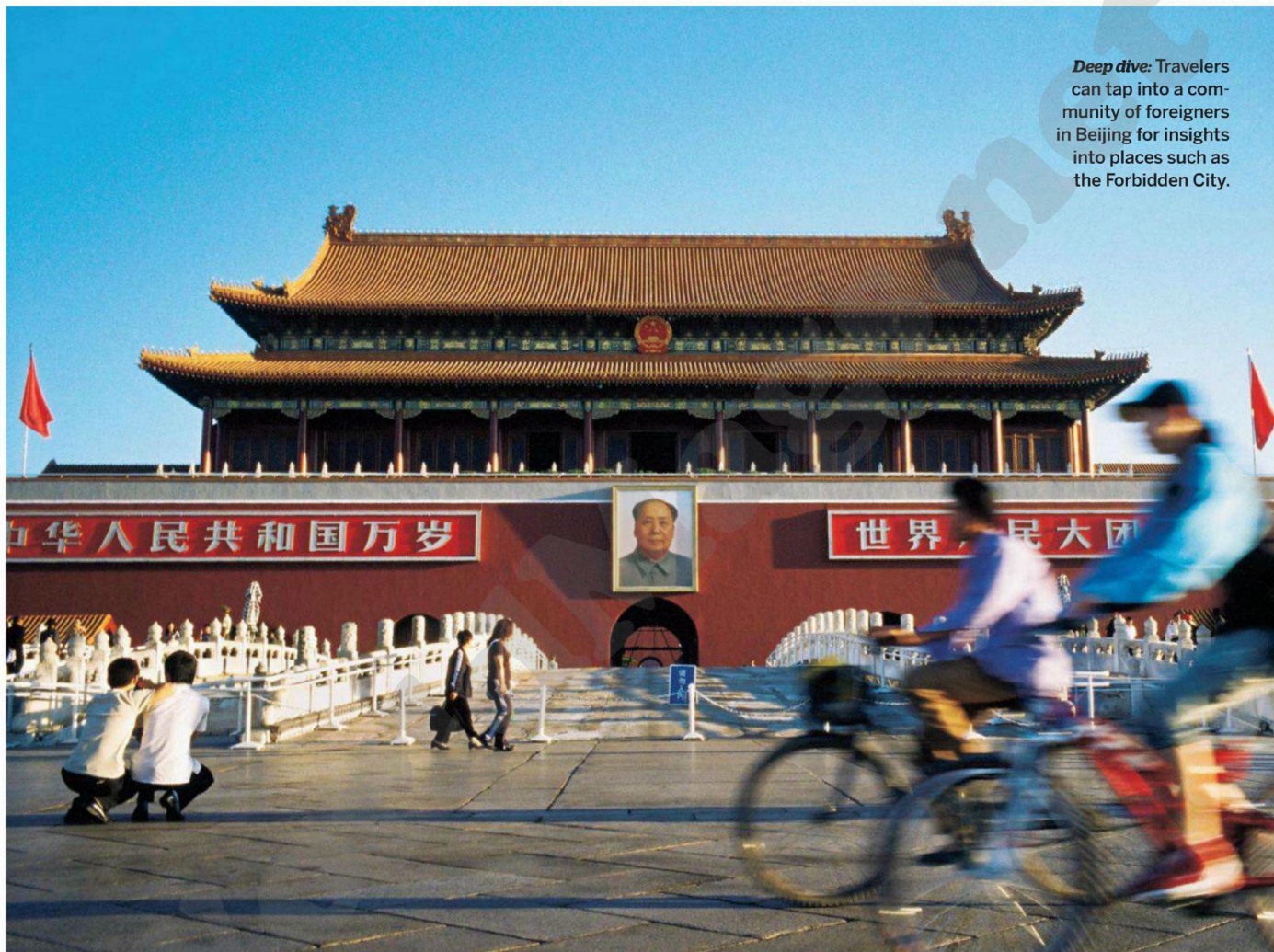


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SMART TRAVELER

[TRAVEL AT ITS BEST]

Deep dive: Travelers can tap into a community of foreigners in Beijing for insights into places such as the Forbidden City.



The Expat Factor

Networks of foreigners living abroad can give your trip an insider edge | By COLLEEN KINDER

WHEN PICO IYER moved to Japan 25 years ago, his intent was to study Zen Buddhism from local masters. But the essayist soon discovered he had just as much to learn from expatriates—a “group of potters, monks, dancers, artists, and vagabonds” who were impressively versed in Japanese culture—as he did from Japanese natives. “Door after door swung open for me, as I began to penetrate Japan—one of the most elusive and impermeable of cultures—thanks to my new foreign friends.” The traveler has much

to gain, says Iyer, from befriending an expat, “ideally one who has made all the mistakes one is busy making and has come to a clearer and more seasoned sense of wisdom.”

Thanks to the rise of foreigners’ clubs around the globe, travelers can tap into expat networks easily. In the past decade, cultural centers have opened in countries ranging from Indonesia to the Netherlands, and from China to Kuwait.

A far cry from expat wives’ clubs of the past, these bustling community centers offer everything from seminars about social

issues to walking tours that explore off-the-tourist-track historic districts. And while they cater to expats—people who’ve already scratched the surface of a foreign culture and want to go deeper—many welcome travelers, too.

“We package and present Chinese culture in an accessible way, understanding Westerners’ expectations,” explains Morgan O’Hara of the Hutong, a cultural center tucked in the back alleys of Beijing. “I think this is a huge benefit to travelers.”

The center typifies the new variety of expat clubs. It was founded by expats—in this case, by two Aussie tour guides with years of experience in China. The Hutong offers a gamut of classes and workshops, some taught by longtime expats, others by bilingual locals.

China can be a tough place for newcomers to explore, which helps explain why so many expat centers facilitating in-depth cultural discovery have flourished there. “We have a lot of friendly regulars,

and it’s always pretty easy to strike up a conversation, even if you’ve come along by yourself,” says Hayden Opie of Beijing Hikers, a group founded by a British expat and a Chinese native who used to rally their friends for weekend hikes to remote sections of the Great Wall, before opening their treks to the public in 2001. “What we do is make it easy for people to experience parts of Beijing and China that they might have difficulty visiting on their own.”

My Beijing Journal

Our reporter takes expat advice while in the Chinese capital



Market tour.

After consulting the calendars of four of Beijing’s major expat cultural houses and foreigners’ clubs, I signed up for every class, trek, and tasting that both piqued my interest and promised to teach me about China. The bonus, I hoped, would be the company of culture-savvy expats—people way ahead of me in getting to know China.

Market Tour: All About Tofu

Cracking a restaurant menu in China—typically a thick binder of blurry photographs and fanciful dish names—humbles every newcomer. I signed up for a “Culinary Local Market Tour” at the Hutong. Guided through the back alleys by Sophia Du, a

foodie from Inner Mongolia, I got an enlightening walk-through of the Dongsi Beidajie market. Du’s overview of tofu alone was worth the price of the outing. Thanks to the tour’s small size (there were just two of us), I could ply her with questions: What are those spindly mushrooms called? Which peppercorn keeps numbing my tongue? Our guide led us past stalls, noting details we would have overlooked (the flower bud on the tip of a Chinese cucumber signals freshness) and pausing while we sampled savory pancakes. I left the market able to recognize black fungus, lotus root, and tofu noodles—staples of Chinese cuisine—and was soon ordering lunch without guesswork. Cost: \$13.

Cooking Class: Sharp Cleavers and Hot Woks

Eager to put my new expertise in Chinese ingredients to use, I jumped into the “Tastes of Beijing Cooking Class.” Also offered by the Hutong, it was conveniently scheduled right after the market tour. The highlight was learning how to use a cleaver, the chopping utensil of choice in China. I loved how it felt in my hand; the Spanish lady to my right and the Finnish couple across the table were equally tickled to mince garlic with their big choppers. Donning aprons, we cooked up three classic Beijing dishes: braised eggplant, beef and leeks, and stir-fried tomato with eggs. While our feast simmered in a huge wok, I listened to two



Cooking class at the Hutong.

Frenchmen as they named the Chinese cities they were backpacking through. I walked away with easy-to-follow recipes and plans to buy a set of knives to bring back home. Cost: \$38.

Day Hike: A Different Side of the Great Wall

The famous fence topped my list, but having a tour bus deposit me there felt so touristy. Luckily, the calendar of the Beijing Hikers club was crammed with alternatives: hikes along unrestored stretches of China’s ancient barrier, some that involved overnight farm stays, others geared around local festivals. Enticed by the promise of scenic views during the hike from Jiankou to Mutianyu, I chose this level-four trek (on a scale of one to five). So steep was our walk along rugged sections of the wall that I ended up clutching the ledge with one hand while using the other hand to prod the loose rocks with a walking stick provided by the group. Even better than the banquet lunch on the way home was the company of diverse hikers. I chatted with an Aussie on the bus, lunched alongside a Swede, and befriended an expat couple who tipped me off about where to find the best kung pao chicken in Beijing. Cost: \$60.

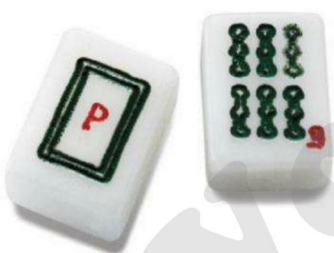
Grad-Level Seminar: Chinese Geopolitics

I wanted some hard facts about the most populous nation on the planet, and I found them at a seminar



Steeped in China: A visitor strolls a section of the Great Wall (above). Teas are discussed and brewed at a class (top right and right).

about rural-urban migrant workers at the China Cultural Center. Attendees sipped flower tea while a Chinese graduate student gave a slide presentation. The expats jotting down notes around me were more than curious; many were experts on the topic, which turned the subsequent question-and-answer session into an impromptu debate about the social cost of growth in China. This was food for the intellect—a chance to contemplate the sweeping changes underway in China and the rest of the world. Cost: \$9.



Game Night: Mah-jongg Rules of Engagement Walk the backstreets of Beijing and you're bound to see elders at the mah-jongg table, huddled over white tiles. Intrigued, I decided to learn the rules of this centuries-old game at a workshop offered by Culture Yard. I entered a courtyard home hidden deep in the city's backstreets and met Ilya Chermnikh, the Russian-Israeli founder of this community center. "I wanted to offer experiences in Beijing that appealed to me personally," he said. Activities range from Chinese cinema



nights to language classes. My teacher, Joshua Yu, explained to the class the intricate rules of play, then spilled the mah-jongg pieces onto a table. By the end of round one, we were getting the hang of the classic game. By round two, we were almost giving the locals a run for their money. Cost: \$11.

Taste Test: All the Tea in China

A coffee lover, I needed some help getting enthused about tea. The weekend "Tea-Tasting Workshop" at the Hutong sounded like a good way to do it. Aussie Sofia Curtney, who found her passion for the leaf while living on a plantation in southern China, led this two-hour exploration. I sat with six others on tiny wooden chairs and watched as our teacher poured five kinds of Chinese tea into glass teacups on her bamboo tray. Curtney gave us permission to slurp—oxygen releases the tea's flavor—and passed around black sesame cookies (she said it was so that the caffeine wouldn't make us jittery). I could soon appreciate the difference between flowery



oolong tea from Guangdong Province and the earthy *pu'er* tea of Yunnan Province, as well as the care that goes into brewing loose-leaf tea. It was a soothing yet energizing way to spend a Saturday afternoon. Cost: \$25.

Final Course: What I Learned Traveling This Way

Hanging out with expats and meeting locals every day meant hearing about things that were happening well beyond the cultural centers. I found out about an off-the-radar Peking duck restaurant, a local music festival, a Communist propaganda museum, a new bullet train to one of China's fastest-growing cities, and, finally, a zany road race that sent me jogging through the dusty alleys. I ended up hiking along the Great Wall twice more, finding even more stunning ways to approach it. By the time departure day arrived, I felt as if I'd visited three dozen friends in China, all of whom—whether for their grasp of Chinese politics or their mental map of the best Yunnan restaurants in Beijing—made superb hosts. —Colleen Kinder

MAKE A CONNECTION

Expat clubs and culture centers worldwide

The best way to find expat centers is to search the name of your destination city plus "cultural center." The word "expat" is of limited use, as many commercial sites for expats clog the Web. If you have a particular activity or class in mind—for example, a tea-tasting workshop—try including that in your search terms. You may also look for a "meetup," either through Meetup.com or Internations.org, a networking and socializing tool for expats. Below are some well-established expat centers that offer events with cultural merit.

Course offerings at the Community Services Association in Cairo, **Egypt**, range from guitar playing to Ramadan cooking.

In **Indonesia**, the Jakarta International Community Center offers day-trips to tea plantations and bamboo villages.

Tilburg International Club in the **Netherlands** sponsors educational activities and social gatherings for foreigners from more than 30 countries.

The American Association of **Malaysia** offers an array of activities, from walking tours of Kuala Lumpur's Little India to batik painting classes.

In **Singapore**, the volunteer-run Friends of the Museums hosts a weekly lecture series and gallery tours led by learned expats.

Located in Kobe, **Japan**, the Community House and Information Centre hosts more than 80 excursions and classes, from guided visits of sake breweries to workshops on Japanese calligraphy. —C.K.



Uncloistered view: Mosteiro dos Jerónimos flaunts lavishly carved stone columns.

48 HOURS

Portuguese Pluck

Economic woes haven't dimmed Lisbon's proud beauty and ambitious drive | **By RAPHAEL KADUSHIN**

LISBON'S ANTIQUE carriages are hitting the road again. They're moving from the National Coach Museum's original, cramped home in a royal riding hall to a newly constructed space designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha. But purists debate whether those rococo vehicles—which sprout gilded cherubs and, in one case, a winged dragon—will really feel at home in an austere, post-modernist, cherub-free building. Despite the controversy, the new venue opens

its doors in late 2012 in a classic Lisbon compromise: Keep racing toward the future while paying homage to a proudly flamboyant past.

Portugal's capital has long mastered that art of reinvention. After a massive earthquake leveled most of the city in 1755, Lisbon was quickly rebuilt, and its pragmatic spirit hasn't flagged since. Even Portugal's current debt crisis hasn't curbed, at least so far, the city's renovations. The most obvious transformation has occurred along the Tagus River, where a large-scale waterfront renewal plan, launched in the 1990s, now enters its second decade of dogged construction. While Lisbon wisely protects its historic city center, the style-conscious Chiado and bohemian Bairro Alto neighborhoods constantly sprout bistros and boutiques. They line the cobblestone streets where those aristocratic carriages once paraded.

WHAT TO DO One of the city's glossiest new museums is housed in a riverfront warehouse formerly used to store dried cod. The now fumigated **Museu do Oriente** offers what local designer Nini Andrade Silva calls “a real bridge between

Portuguese and Asian cultures.” Recent crowd-pleasing exhibits have included a display of glassy-eyed Hello Kittys and other Japanese pop culture icons.

Oceanário de Lisboa, an original anchor of the waterfront revival, opened during the city's 1998 World Expo. The new Sea Building wing, inaugurated in 2011, keeps the attraction fresh, but the original wing still impresses with fully stocked ecosystems that let you trek, in a few minutes, from the Azores to an Antarctic snowbank packed with penguins.

The riverfront's most prominent landmark, the **Mosteiro dos Jerónimos**, lies close to the port where Vasco da Gama set sail for India in 1497, followed by waves of Portuguese traders who turned the country into a maritime power. The resulting spice money helped finance this 16th-century monastery. Peek into the refectory lined with 18th-century ceramic tiles depicting the biblical story of Joseph, then climb to the second floor of the cloisters for an overview of the courtyard.

Just down the street, the popular **Pastéis de Belém** bakery serves Lisbon's signature custard tarts warm from the oven—and still made following a secret monastery recipe. If the lines grow too long, chef José Avillez, of the celebrated Lisbon restaurant **Cantinho do Avillez**, suggests heading nearby to **A Chique de Belém** bakery, where patrons can savor the pastéis on an open-air terrace.

In Baixa, the city's commercial center, one of the newest attractions is **MUDE**, a museum devoted to modern design and fashion (think green satin boots and faux leopard pumps spot-lit like royal jewels). Design fans can then head to the neighboring district of Chiado, where the boutiques include only-in-Lisbon shops such as **Luvária Ulisses**, selling made-to-order leather gloves. **A Vida Portuguesa** stocks traditional artisanal crafts, including brightly striped Alentejo woolen blankets that look entirely contemporary.

Fado singer Cuca Roseta proposes ending the day at **Silk Club**, “a panoramic spot right by central Largo de Camões Square.” Chef Avillez recommends the **São Pedro de Alcântara** garden with its tile mosaic map depicting some of the city's noteworthy buildings: “At night, the young people gather here, under the shadows of the trees, before heading out to the clubs of the Bairro Alto.”

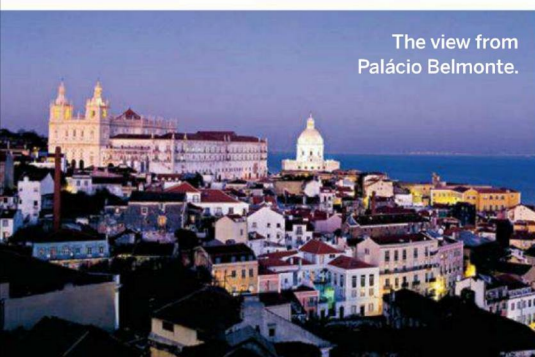
WHERE TO EAT Lisbon's best restaurants dish up authentic Portuguese cuisine that has been respectfully tweaked and updated, like the city itself. At **Bica do Sapato**, diners tuck into rabbit loin stuffed



Handmade gloves at Luvária Ulisses.

MIGUEL GONZALEZ/REDFUX (MONASTERY); JOAO PEDRO MARNOTO (GLOVE SHOP)

with sausage on the alfresco riverside terrace. **Largo Restaurant** has an especially evocative setting in the old cloisters of a convent. The long-running Bairro Alto classic **Pap'Açorda** is famous for its dish of lobster *açorda* topped by bread crumbs. Also reliable in the neighborhood is the recently opened **Sea Me**, where diners select from a fresh-catch display including sea bream or Algarve prawns laid across shaved ice. For globally influenced flavors, **Pedro e o Lobo** blends Mediterranean and Portuguese cuisines, while **Ibo** rouses patrons with its African curries.



The view from
Palácio Belmonte.

WHERE TO STAY Lisbon has seen a recent explosion of small, quirky boutique hotels, but if you want a touch of Old World grandeur, book a room—well, really one of the eight suites—at **Palácio Belmonte** (from \$487). The former home of the earls of Belmonte features photo-ready views of the Alfama district from its organic gardens, a saltwater pool faced in black marble, serious antiques (from rustic wooden armoires to canopied beds and azulejo-tiled walls), and a library bulging with more than 4,000 books.

At the contemporary **Altis Belém Hotel** (from \$209), commissioned wall panels, depicting stories and places from Portugal's era of exploration, accent airy guest rooms that have picture windows overlooking the marina.

Hotel da Estrela (from \$174), one of Lisbon's newest boutique hotels, resides in a former school and offers its own forms of education; some of the staff come from the local School of Hospitality and Tourism, and guest rooms are adorned with vintage maps.

The centrally located **LX Boutique Hotel's** room sizes (and prices) range from Xsential (aka small, from \$111) to Xplendid (a suite with terrace, from \$206). Each floor is devoted to a Lisbon-centric design theme: The fado floor surrounds guests with a sound track of Portuguese ballads and guitar-patterned wallpaper. ■

[ON FOOT]

ALFAMA DISTRICT

Shopping and singing in a classic Lisbon neighborhood

Lisbon's Alfama district reads like a condensed urban history lesson: The Moors helped shape the quarter before it became a Jewish neighborhood and then an enclave of traders, fishermen, and sailors. The Alfama emerged from the 1755 earthquake better than most of Lisbon, and its whitewashed houses and cobbled streets winding down a steep hillside remain largely intact.

It's easiest to tackle the quarter if you start at the craggy top, at **Castelo de São Jorge (1)**, where disarmed cannon line the wide ramparts. Take any of the streets plunging downhill, though make sure you stop for coffee at the kiosk of the **Largo das Portas do Sol (2)**, a terrace offering a stellar view of the Alfama and the waterfront. Then browse the **Rua Augusto Rosa (3)**, with its cluster of shops including Ricardo Hogan's gallery devoted to wood-carved saints and the A Arte da Terra handicraft shop, which stocks the hand-embroidered love handkerchiefs that infatuated girls traditionally gave to their crushes. Below is the **Sé Cathedral (4)**, a Romanesque landmark built to commemorate the Christian defeat of Lisbon's Moors in 1147. Pay a visit to the sacristy, filled with relics of martyred saints. If it's Tuesday or Saturday morning, make a detour to the Feira da Ladra, a sprawling flea market where you can still



Clube de Fado.

find antique azulejo ceramic tiles, many glazed in a crisp blue and white palette (those chips just add to the patina).

At the Alfama's riverfront, the **Museu do Fado (5)** presents exhibits devoted to Portugal's native, bittersweet musical form and the *fadistas* (fado singers) famous for hitting the most mournful notes. "The fado comes from the streets of Lisbon," says Cuca Roseta, one of the country's most acclaimed young fadistas. "It tells the story of the sailors who left port and never returned, and the passion of love. It's really the essence of Portugal, a music that captures the rhythm and cadence of the ocean waves." If you want to hear the real thing, Roseta suggests **Clube de Fado (6)**. "It's where the best fadistas sing, and also the place where new singers can learn from the most experienced ones." —R.K.





Snowed inn: A cabin to while away winter in Lake Placid.

HOTEL CENTRAL

Snug Ski Lodges

Throw another log on the fire and get cozy at these four Northeastern getaways | **By JACKIE CARADONIO**

AS WINTER'S FIRST heavy snows bury New England under a fluffy blanket of white, the region's best ski resorts come alive with the crackling of firewood and the humming of chairlifts.

VERMONT Old farm buildings dot the hilltops surrounding the **Wildflower Inn** (from \$149), located just 10 minutes from Burke Mountain ski resort in the quiet village of Lyndonville. Innkeepers Jim and Mary O'Reilly oversee the day-to-day activities at the 515-acre property, where the federal-style main house features a farm-to-table restaurant. Its 24 cozy guest rooms are housed in a converted coach

house, blacksmith shop, schoolhouse, and carriage house. Cross-country skiing starts in your own backyard, with the area's Kingdom Trails running along the property. Beginning in early March, trade skis for snowshoes and enjoy a quiet walk through the inn's maple forest to the local sugarhouse, where David Dolloff, the neighboring sugar maker, teaches visitors about syrup tapping and grading, and often provides samples of the freshest batch.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Edison, and Alfred Hitchcock have all stayed at this elegant hotel in Bretton Woods, now known as the **Omni Mount**

Washington Resort (from \$189). Today, guests return to this grand resort for its stately Spanish Renaissance architecture and its location next to the highest peak in New England. Gilded Age accents—Tiffany stained glass, ornate crown moldings, and brass fixtures modeled after Edison's first electric lamp—highlight the resort's National Historic Landmark status. Take a break from the slopes with a ride down the zip line, which races through Rosebrook Canyon's snow-covered valleys.

NEW YORK A catastrophic fire ravaged the 19th-century **Lake Placid Lodge** (from \$500) in 2005, but following a painstaking three-year reconstruction, this Adirondack Mountains

landmark has been restored to its original refined splendor, accentuated with Hudson River school paintings, exposed wood beams, and fieldstone fireplaces. Tucked along the edge of Lake Placid, the lodge's 17 cabins and 13 guest rooms now feature designer touches like Persian rugs, handcrafted log-and-twigs beds, faux fur throws, and picture windows that frame the lake or Whiteface Mountain, whose slopes are just a 20-minute drive away.

MAINE Upon stepping into the log cabin-style Great Room at the rustic **Loon Lodge** (from \$110) on Rangeley Lake, you'll find things as they were more than a century ago when the family camp first opened in 1909. Adorned with handmade quilts and Old Hickory furniture, this nine-room retreat in Maine's western mountains unplugs from modern-day intrusions like televisions and telephones. The slopes at Saddleback Mountain are a short drive away. Closer still are the region's top-rated snowmobile trails, which travel as far north as Canada. ■

WHERE TO EAT, APRÈS SKI

Three dining experiences worth bundling up for

A long day of hard work on the slopes calls for culinary rewards, so rather than head home from Maine's Sugarloaf Mountain, climb aboard the snowcat destined for **Bullwinkle's At Night**

mountaintop restaurant. Here, guests are greeted with a glass of champagne and a six-course menu of local cuisine such as herb-crusted rack of elk and juniper berry bison loin. In Lake Clear,

New York, about 30 minutes from Lake Placid, arrange for a horse-drawn sleigh from Adirondack Sleigh Rides to whisk you through the area's balsam forests before dropping you at **Hohmeyer's Lake Clear Lodge** for seasonal entrées made from locally grown products. At Mad River Valley's **Common Man**

restaurant in Warren, Vermont, a 150-year-old barn features crystal chandeliers hanging from timber rafters and candles lighting weathered oak tables. In the kitchen, everything from the sauces to the bread and dessert is made from scratch and uses ingredients from area farms.—J.C.

ADVENTURE

Blissfully Snow Bound

Where winter lovers get their outdoor thrills | By **PETER BRONSKI**

When Old Man Winter blankets the landscape with a fresh pile of powder, consider it a cue to bundle up and head outdoors. Like the thrill of an impromptu snowball fight, cold-weather activities—from igloo building to bobsledding—inject a shot of adrenaline sure to help shake off any bouts of cabin fever.

DOGSLEDDING, SEWARD, ALASKA > On **Iditaride Sled Dog Tours**, led by the seasoned Seavey family, two novice mushers take turns driving sleds—pulled by four aspiring (or retired) Iditarod huskies—on a 16-mile mosey through the Resurrection River Valley to the electric-blue Exit Glacier, at the foot of the rugged Kenai Mountains.

OLYMPIC SPORTS, LAKE PLACID, N.Y. > A go-for-the-gold spirit fills the two-time setting of the Winter Games. At Mount Van Hoevenberg's **Olympic Sports Complex**, wannabes rocket through wild turns by bobsled (with a pro driver and brakeman) or skeleton sled (*right*). Nordic skiers can try biathlon (target shooting) next to Olympians on 31 miles of trails.

IGLOO BUILDING, VANCOUVER, B.C. > Winter nights feel surprisingly snug when you're hunkered down in Inuit-style igloos. Aided by the savvy of **Westcoast Adventures**, warm-blooded campers learn how to select a site in a secluded mountain meadow, prepare the snow, cut blocks, and assemble an icy abode.

WATERFALL CLIMBING, OURAY, COLO. > Climbers (novice to pro) convene at the Ouray Ice Park in the soaring San Juan Mountains to ascend the frozen flows of fat, blue ice that line the 40-to-200-foot Uncompahgre Gorge walls. **San Juan Mountain Guides** provides climbing harnesses, crampons, and ice axes, plus expert instruction.

HUT TOURING, GASPÉSIE, QUEBEC > The international extension of the Appalachian Trail weaves through and over Canada's glacially carved Chic-Chocs and McGerrigle Mountains. Wood-heated mountain huts dot the five-day Logan Circuit—a pleasant jaunt by ski or snowshoe, especially when **Ski Chic-Chocs** guides are leading the way and arranging to haul your luggage. A short drive away, **Gîte du Mont-Albert** is a luxe end point.

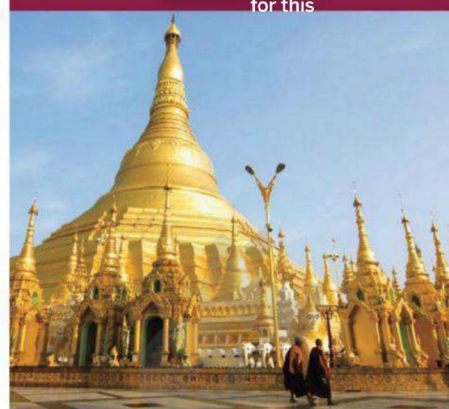


Whiteout: At Gaspésie National Park in Quebec, cross-country skiers can navigate 13 trails.

DAVE SCHMIDT/ORDA (SKELETON TRACK), STEVE DESCHÊNES/PARC NATIONAL DE LA GASPÉSIE/SÉPAQ (SNOWSHOER)

Voyages to Antiquity announces

This would be a caption for this



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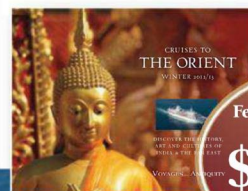
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CHECKING IN

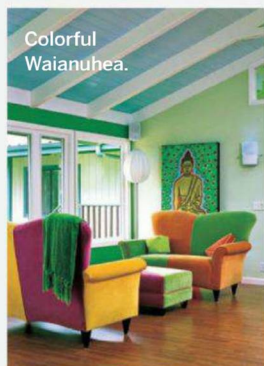
Big Island B&Bs

Unwind and power up for your next Hawaiian adventure at these four tropical escapes | **By MEG WEAVER**

Holualoa Inn

HOLUALOA, KONA FOOTHILLS

Set on the slopes of Mount Hualalai among 4,300 coffee trees and an organic vegetable garden, the inn's six guest rooms are furnished with pieces the owner collected on her travels. Holualoa lures guests with views of the Pacific and details such as hardwood eucalyptus floors, stained glass panes that capture sunlight, and an inviting pool. Tour the inn's coffee farm, or walk to the nearby artists village for local crafts—handmade ukuleles and paintings of native birds. From \$285.



Colorful
Waianuhea.

the shared 1,500-square-foot wraparound lanai with panoramic views of the south Kona coast. After an active day of exploring volcanoes, refresh outdoors in the lava rock showers. From \$129.

Ka'awa Loa Plantation

COASTAL KONA

Overlooking Kealahakula Bay, this start-up coffee farm also grows 42 varieties of fruit including bananas, mangoes, papayas, and white pineapples that are served at the breakfast table alongside homemade baked goods. The inn's five earth-toned rooms and one cottage have access to

Kalaekilohana

NA'ALEHU, SOUTH COAST

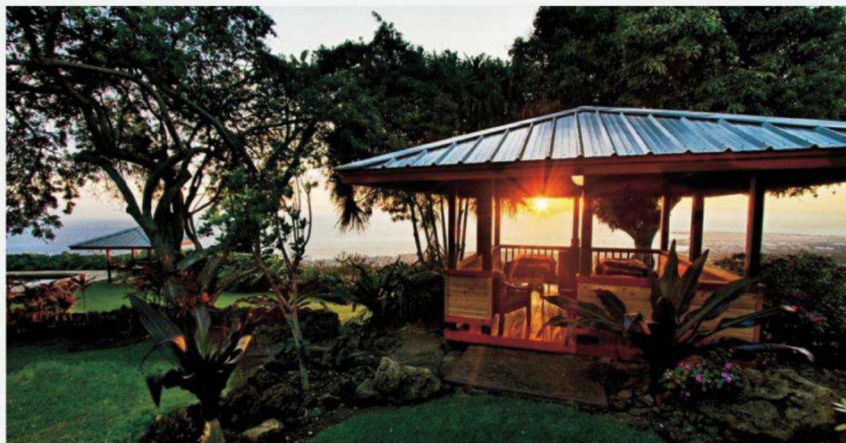
One of the Big Island's few Hawaiian-owned B&Bs, the plantation-style inn offers on-site workshops, including traditional weaving, hula, and lei making. Co-owner Kilohana Domingo received a fellowship from the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian and is known for his

feather art, which is displayed in the inn's library. The four suites are cozy with soft, hypoallergenic blankets and pillows, locally milled wood floors, and personal lanais. Located at South Point, where it's thought that Polynesian seafarers first set foot on Hawaii, Kalaekilohana is minutes from the southern entrance of Volcanoes National Park. From \$249.

Waianuhea

HONOKAA, HAMAKUA COAST

Halfway between Kona and Hilo, high on the slopes of volcanic Mauna Kea, Waianuhea is practically off the grid, capturing its water from the rain, its electricity from the sun, and its fertilizer from composted food. Three of its five guest rooms include gas or wood stoves for chilly nights; two rooms offer soaking tubs. Enjoy nightly wine and pupu appetizers by the roaring fire in the common room, and wake up to views of Mauna Kea. From \$210.



Ocean oasis: Holualoa's spa offers guests an outdoor massage in the garden pavilion at sunset.



The Historic
District's
Le Petit Hôtel.

[DEALS]

WHERE TO STAY IN MONTREAL

LE PETIT HÔTEL > HISTORIC DISTRICT

With sleek bamboo floors, clear glass sinks, and huge windows, Le Petit Hôtel feels more as if you've borrowed a fortunate friend's loft for the weekend than merely checked into a hotel. Much like Montreal itself, this 24-room boutique property is a wonderful mix of old and new. The hotel's two buildings date to 1867, and each suite features contemporary details such as exposed stone walls and curvy neon orange chairs. Breakfast, included with your stay, is served in the café or delivered to your room. From \$160.

HÔTEL CHEZ SWANN > DOWNTOWN

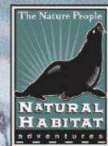
The Tudor-style building, which has served as both a garment shop and an Irish pub, today is a 23-room boutique hotel within walking distance of chic shops, restaurants, and the Museum of Fine Arts. Local artists decorated every room, so expect touches of whimsy like grassy rugs and inviting window alcoves where you can people-watch. Wi-Fi and breakfast are included with your room, and a Bixi station, the city's \$5-a-day bike-share program, is located just across the street. From \$175.

L'HÔTEL > HISTORIC DISTRICT

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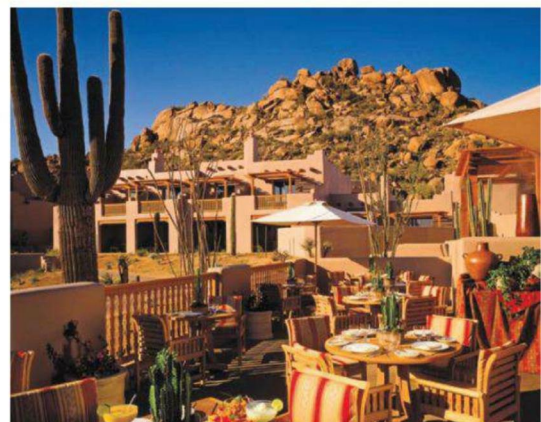
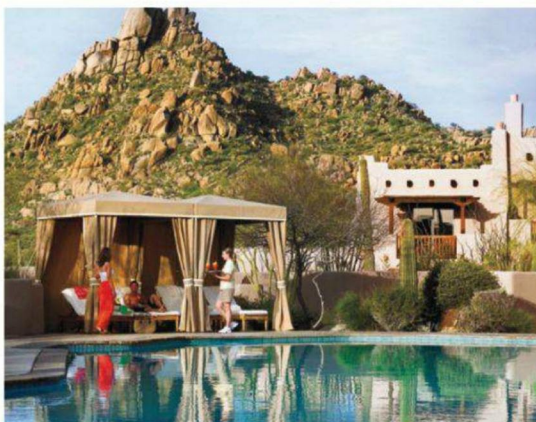


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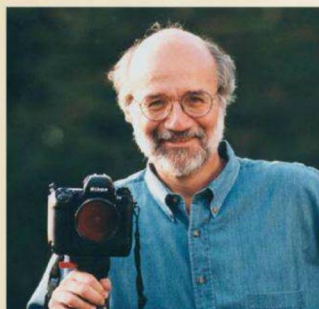
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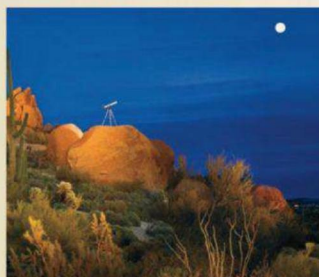


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Tea service at Brown's Hotel.

TASTE OF TRAVEL

Taking Tea to New Highs

Inspired by storybooks, fashion, and flowers, London area hotels update the traditional tea | *By* RAPHAEL KADUSHIN

THE CLASSIC English afternoon tea is more than just a meal. It has come to symbolize our romantic image of old-school British tradition. But that doesn't mean tradition can't evolve. The newest English sport is the race to create the most unique, high-concept specialty tea. Where to start? For couture design outside of London Fashion Week, head to Pret-a-Portea at the **Berkeley London Hotel**. Taking on a new direction every six months, the tea offerings celebrate top designers. Among the sugary masterpieces: a peach-colored sponge cake torte overlaid with a chocolate crocodile print,

modeled after a Victoria Beckham tote, and an orange and lemon mousse styled after a Stella McCartney citrus print sheath.

The **Sanderson Hotel** serves a Mad Hatter's Afternoon Tea that follows Alice straight down the rabbit hole. The Lewis Carroll homage includes rainbow-colored finger sandwiches, a Queen of Heart's strawberry and cream mousse, and a layer cake with a chocolate rabbit's clock.

Overlooking Green Park, the **Athenaeum Hotel** counters with an Evergreen Tea that salutes the English garden, and the property's own Living Wall—a tapestry of plants and flowers crawling up part

of the hotel's facade. The floral-inspired selection includes orange blossom scones, rose-scented meringues, fruit tarts with lavender jam, and jasmine flower tea.

Brown's Hotel in Mayfair makes one of the best cases for the beauty of tradition. The hotel's English Tea Room, a wood-paneled haven warmed by fireplaces, guarantees there are two tea sommeliers to guide you through the 17 teas and scones.

The **One Aldwych** hotel's Modern British Afternoon Tea offers a taste of the country's suddenly serious approach to cuisine. The tea is served in the Lobby Bar, a stylish Covent Garden hangout punctuated by massive flower bouquets. Chef Tony Fleming replaces the usual decadent chocolate tart with a two-bite mouthful and dresses a petite duck egg with English asparagus. In season, the Summer Berry Tea dishes up confit cherry tartlets and provides a whiff of the English midsummer larder if you can't get out to the shires. That shouldn't stop you from trying though, especially since a country drive promises its own range of novelty teas. Among the 2011 winners of the Tea Guild awards selected by the U.K. Tea Council is **Ashdown Park's** afternoon spread. The East Sussex manor house hotel serves a grown-up tea with Scottish smoked salmon sandwiches and a goofy but endearing Winnie the Pooh tea for kids, which includes hunny sandwiches and a Kanga cupcake. Surrounding the hotel is Ashdown Forest, where A. A. Milne took his son, Christopher Robin, for nature walks. The hotel will pack sandwiches into a picnic hamper to enjoy in a bona fide picture-book setting. ■



British redcoat: The Berkeley tea's designer cookies celebrate London's latest fashion trends.

AFTERNOON DELIGHT

Three back-in-the-U.S.A. places to enjoy a spot of tea

If you can't manage a British Mad Hatter weekend, there are plenty of U.S. options that let you experience a proper English tea. Among the best: **Tea & Sympathy**, the epicenter of all things British

in New York City's Greenwich Village, serves a full-on afternoon tea—with fresh-baked scones and clotted cream—as well as a Rule Britannia menu of bangers and mash, Welsh rarebit, and

shepherd's pie. Chicago's branch of the **Peninsula Hotel** serves an elegant version of tea in its cream-and-gold lobby with opulent touches that have included lobster egg salad, fresh-baked madeleines, and salmon mousse with caviar. **Lovejoy's Tea Room** in San Francisco, with quirky

mismatched china and handmade tea cozies, offers everything from a sweet tea accompanied by petits fours to a healthy tea served with organic spring greens, fruit, and artichoke hummus. Kids will enjoy their very own "wee" tea, complete with a crustless cream cheese and jelly sandwich. —R.K.

FAMILY

Baby, It's Cold Outside

Festive carnivals take the chill out of winter | **By MARGARET LOFTUS**

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

For those living in Anchorage in the 1930s, winter was one long slog—until a few stir-crazy residents put on a sports tournament to coincide with the days that miners and trappers brought their goods to town. Nearly 80 years later, **Fur Rendezvous** has evolved into a 10-day celebration of Alaskan life, highlighted by the running of the reindeer and sled dog races that draw mushers from around the world. Still, “Rondy” has remained true to its roots with a lineup of outdoor sports such as snowshoe softball, ice hockey, and a frostbite foot-race. Feb. 24-Mar. 4.

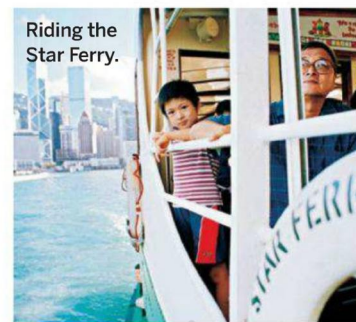
SARANAC LAKE, N.Y. > Deep in the Adirondack wilderness, the **Saranac Lake Winter Carnival** hosts traditional

winter sports competitions—Alpine and Nordic skiing, children’s skating races, and curling—as well as offbeat contests, such as the women’s frying pan toss. There are concerts, fireworks, and a parade that reflects a chosen theme (this year: aliens from outer space). But the centerpiece of this 115-year-old fete is an elaborate ice palace built by volunteers with thousands of blocks of ice harvested from Lake Flower. Feb. 3-12.

OTTAWA, ONT. > **Winterlude** transforms Canada’s capital into a wonderland of ice sculptures and hot chocolate stands during the dreariest time of year. The center of the festival is the frozen Rideau Canal Skateway, home of the Beaver Cup Hockey Classic, a winter

triathlon (8-km skate, 5-km ski, and 5-km run), skating demos, and the quirky bed race. Families make a beeline to the **Snowflake Kingdom** in Gatineau for its snow slides. In the evenings, local chefs and winemakers show off Ontario’s bounty in multicourse dinners. Feb. 3-20.

ST. PAUL, MINN. > Allegedly irked by a reporter’s dismissal of St. Paul as “another Siberia, unfit for human habitation in the winter” in 1886, a group of boosters set out to show off their city with two weeks of winter games, toboggan slides, and a towering ice castle. More than a century later, locals and visitors still gather at the **Winter Carnival** to march in torch-lit parades, run half-marathons, and admire detailed ice sculptures. Jan. 26-Feb. 5.



[ITINERARY]

HONG KONG WITH KIDS

In this bustling city of Chinese culture, a single block holds surprises galore: a lion dance, a musician playing a traditional *erhu*, a bakery selling sweet buns straight from the pan.

Early in the morning, **Kowloon** and **Victoria Parks** are often filled with locals doing tai chi or walking small dogs dressed in coats or T-shirts. At most Hong Kong seafood restaurants you can see everything from carp the size of house cats to glistening cuttlefish, swimming around in tanks. (One teen said: “It’s like snorkeling without going underwater.”) Spot a variety of fish at the open-air market/restaurant village of **Lei Yue Mun** in Kowloon.

A ride on the **Star Ferry** is an experience not to be missed. Take the ferry twice: Ride the upper deck for views of the harbor, then the lower deck to see the boat engine up close.

Older kids might enjoy walking up to the **Ten Thousand Buddhas** monastery in Shatin. The steps are flanked by golden statues of the Buddha in many forms—male, female, fat, skinny, smiling, frowning.

Hong Kong kids love their snacks. *Daan* tart, a miniature custardy egg pastry, is an after-school treat sold at most local bakeries. —Daisann McLane



Fireworks light up the ice palace at Saranac Lake.

Nights at the Museum Snooze on the submarine U.S.S. *Blueback* at the **Oregon Museum of Science and Industry** in Portland, where families get an insider look at life aboard subs and learn the science behind them. In Philadelphia, the **Penn Museum’s** “40 Winks With the Sphinx” program lets kids try their hands at writing hieroglyphics before sleeping among ancient Egyptian artifacts. Don lighthouse keepers’ uniforms at the **Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum** in St. Michaels, Md., to camp out in the 1879 Hooper Strait Lighthouse (right). —Alisson Clark



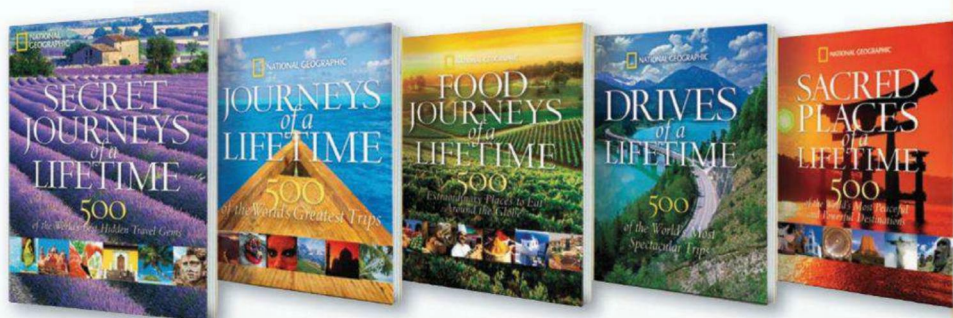
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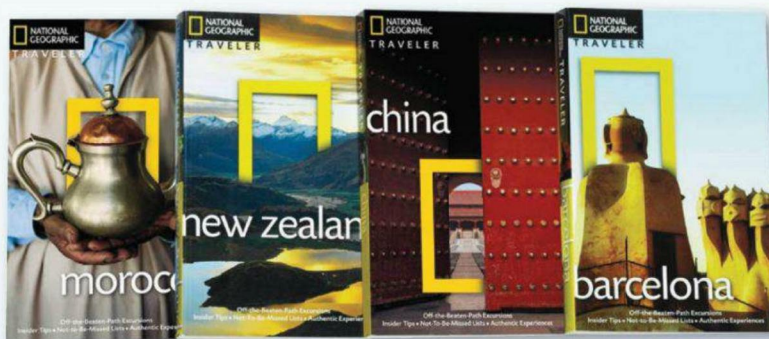
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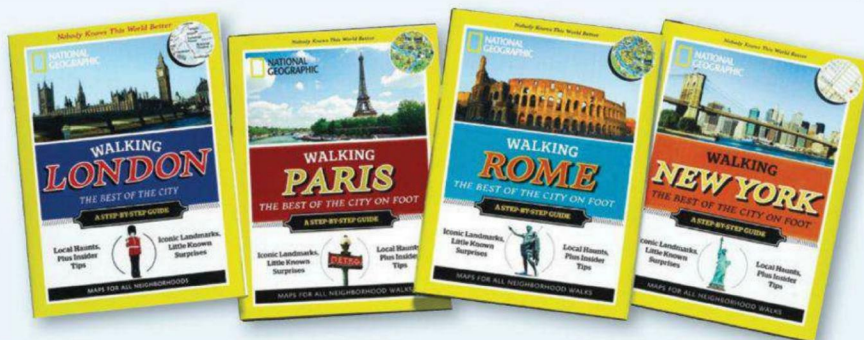
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An Island Fit for an Empress

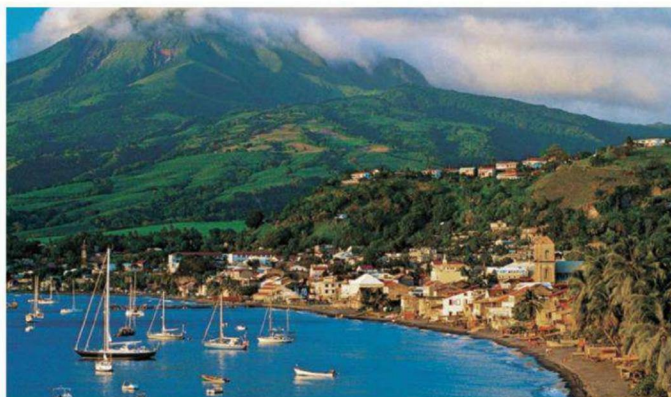
Off-the-boat excursions in Martinique | *By* EVERETT POTTER

A French outpost since 1635, Martinique gained cachet when Napoleon chose native daughter Joséphine as his bride in 1796. Expect to see this mountainous Caribbean isle and its capital, Fort-de-France, on more cruise itineraries this sailing season. Here are four authentic island experiences:

Under the Volcano

6 HOURS

One of the most dramatic drives in the Caribbean starts in colorful Fort-de-France and winds through Martinique's rain forest along the N3 highway. You emerge at Saint-Pierre, above which rises Mount Pelée. On May 8, 1902, the volcano erupted, killing 28,000 people. The small, moving **Musée Volcanologique** displays melted



Regal isle: The slumbering volcano Mount Pelée looms over Saint-Pierre.

glass, dolls, and photographs of mummified victims.

From Bonaparte to Beaches

6 HOURS

Drive south from Fort-de-France to Les Trois-Îlets. Marie-Josèphe-

Rose Tascher de la Pagerie—later to become Joséphine, the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte and empress of France—was born here on her father's sugar plantation in 1763. Today the **Musée de la Pagerie** conjures her life with por-

traits, love letters from Napoleon, and her childhood bed. Later, head south to spend a lazy afternoon at crescent-shaped **Les Salines** beach.

Paddling the Bay

5 HOURS

Explore the world of coral reefs, mangroves, and *fond blancs* (sandbars) up close on a kayaking excursion with eco-minded Max Menir of outfitter **Fleur d'O**. Menir points out reef fish and other sea life while paddling the calm waters of Baie des Mulets.

Waterfront Walk

2 HOURS

Highlights of a Fort-de-France walk include the art nouveau **Bibliothèque Schoelcher** (Rue de la Liberté) and the landmark **St. Louis Cathedral** (Rue Victor-Schoelcher). At the **Grand Marché**, vendors sell fruits, bundles of dried sarsaparilla sticks, and piles of chilies. At **Chez Carole**, in the market, you can lunch on octopus and red snapper.

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ROAD TRIP

Vintage South Africa

Sample the nuances of the Western Cape on a multiday drive through its history-rich Winelands | **By JACKIE CARADONIO**

SOUTH AFRICA grabbed the global spotlight with the 2010 soccer World Cup (and those unforgettable buzzing *vuvuzelas*), prompting an influx of sparkling hotels and celebrity chef restaurants to Cape Town. But deeper roots, carefully cultivated over time, lie in the Western Cape's outlying Winelands. Visitors find craggy mountains, historic Dutch towns, and hilltop vineyards where Cape leopards are sometimes spotted.

With traditional stucco homesteads turned chic wineries and hotels, this quiet region embodies its country's revived spirit as well as its centuries-old colonial heritage. Winding routes that teeter on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean navigate the habitat of chacma baboons, silver trees, and European-influenced villages.

CAPE CRUSADE Head south from Cape Town on M63 into the rugged, mountainous terrain of the backcountry. Follow M41 east to Constantia, less than 15 miles from Cape Town's center and the site of the region's first vintages (see "Drinking a Long Pour of History," page 42). **Klein Constantia Estate**, a winery dating to the late 17th century, has earned loyal fans: According to legend, Napoleon Bonaparte guzzled countless bottles while exiled on St. Helena.

Enjoy lamb confit and salmon Nicoise salad at nearby Constantia Uitsig Hotel's **River Cafe**, its courtyard fringed by an herb garden. The adjoining tea room serves sweet, nutty rooibos (roy-bus) tea, a red infusion of needlelike leaves.

Drive south on M4. With shimmering Atlantic Ocean vistas, the cliffside road rims **Table Mountain**

Full-bodied: Morgenhof Wine Estate (above) dates to a farm granted in 1692. The Western Cape is home to African penguins (left) and a range of protea flowers (below).



National Park, a 96-square-mile sanctuary punctuated by rugged bluffs and sandy flats. On False Bay, Boulders Beach hosts a colony of roughly 2,100 African penguins. Get an up-close peek at the endangered waddlers from adjacent Foxy Beach's raised boardwalks, which wind along the penguins' nesting grounds.

Continue farther south to the **Cape of Good Hope**, called the fairest cape in all the world by Sir Francis Drake. Two towering navigational beacons topped with crosses pay homage to Portuguese explorers Bartolomeu Dias and Vasco da Gama, who opened trade routes to India with their voyages in 1488 and 1497.

It's a steep climb to nearby Cape Point's lighthouse; take the funicular, named the "Flying Dutchman" in a reference to the famed ghost ship said to haunt the cape's waters. Or tackle the surrounding nature reserve's extensive hiking trails, which weave among thousands of native plants such as showy protea flowers in the endemic fynbos scrubland, which tops the Amazon in plant biodiversity. Also indigenous here: 250-plus bird species, such as the orange-breasted sunbird, as well as springbok, baboons, and ostriches.

ANCHORS AWEIGH Back on M4, head north some 20 miles to the vibrant fishing village of **Kalk Bay**, near one of the Dutch East India Company's earliest anchorage sites. Wander the shops along Main Road: Browse antiques at the **Railway House**, porcelain at the **Forge**, and steel home accents and handmade cutlery at **Artvark**.

Linger by the sea at the glass-enclosed **Harbour House** restaurant (pick a table near the water). Scan for False Bay's humpback and southern right whales, as well as the restaurant's fishing boat bringing in its daily haul. Just down the shore, Kalk Bay Reef lures daring surfers with its heavy barrel waves and shallow reef.

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Within walking distance of the waterfront, the stately **Chartfield Guest-house** embraces classic Dutch style with whitewashed walls and restored hardwood floors. Next door to the 1898 seaside mansion, the **Majestic Spa** uses aromatic products distilled from indigenous plants.

A VINE EDUCATION Drive northeast on Baden Powell Drive toward the vineyards of Stellenbosch (to your right is **Kogelberg Nature Reserve**). After about 25 miles, take N2 Road to R44. Along the way, you'll pass the turnoff for **96 Winery Road**, a dinner spot worth doubling back to later. Local winemakers convene to swap stories and feast on wild mushroom tarte tatin with truffle cream. For now, stop at the **Mooiberge Farm Stall** for biltong (cured meat). At the **Stellenbosch Fresh Goods Market** (Saturdays only), picnickers can gather more local treats, from *melktert* (milk tart) to *plasshoender* (slow-cooked chicken).

Following R44 north into downtown Stellenbosch, you'll pass traditional Cape Dutch-style homesteads (think ornate gables and thatched roofs) en route to **Stellenbosch University's** botanical gardens,

with bromeliads and koi ponds. Near these grounds in 1925, a horticultural professor crossed a Pinot Noir with a Hermitage vine to develop the Pinotage, South Africa's signature grape.

Head a few miles north toward the 319-year-old **Morgenhof Estate**. The five-room manor house, which also offers wine tastings, makes a fine place to spend the night.

FRENCH CONNECTION Cruise east along the rambling Helshoogte Road toward Franschhoek ("French corner" in Dutch), a village settled by Huguenot refugees in the 1680s. Bordeaux-style varietals and a lively art scene maintain a French accent. Just outside town, stop at **La Motte Estate** to taste its Shiraz and Sauvignon Blanc, followed by a hike on a trail through the foothills behind the estate or a visit to the on-site museum, which mounts colorful landscapes of the Highveld region by South African painter Jacob H. Pierneef.

Nearby is an estate of **Grham Beck Wines**, a champion of conservation-driven farming practices. Toast its efforts with the creamy Brut NV—the bubbly poured at Nelson Mandela's 1994 inauguration.

Back in Franschhoek, **Tsonga** features leather shoes and bags hand-crafted by Zulu women of the Drakensberg foothills. Down Main Street, **Cafe des Arts** hosts jazz jams. At the posh Le Quartier Français hotel's **Screening Room** theater, film lovers sink into plush armchairs to watch current flicks and film noir.



LANGUAGE LESSONS Take R45 north to the Drakenstein Valley, where traces of its native inhabitants, the Khoikhoi and San tribes, show up in Wemmershoek's ancient rock paintings. At the 17th-century **Babylonstoren** garden, detour through the prickly pear maze and graze on a meal from the garden's pickings.

A ten-mile drive north leads to Paarl. On granite-domed Paarl Mountain (called "tortoise mountain" by the Khoikhoi), the **Afrikaans Language Monument** illustrates the wide-ranging cultural and linguistic influences of Afrikaans, from German to Malay, represented here as alternating concave and convex shapes. In town, exhibits at the **Afrikaans Language Museum** reveal early documents of that language, some written in Arabic script.

A few miles south at **Fairview** farm, pick up a block of Roydon Camembert (made using secret methods). At the **Palmiet Valley Estate**, set amid 96 acres of vineyards and gardens, fuel up on Cape-Malay fare. Then it's on to **Evergreen Stables**. Ride horseback through the Du Toitskloof, a pass faintly perfumed by olive groves and pine trees. Up here, little appears to have changed since the arrival of early colonists. The manicured vineyards below, however, suggest otherwise. ■



Wind tousles tourists at what was once called Cape of Storms for its fierce tempests.

DRINKING A LONG POUR OF HISTORY

Decant 350-plus years of South Africa's wine production

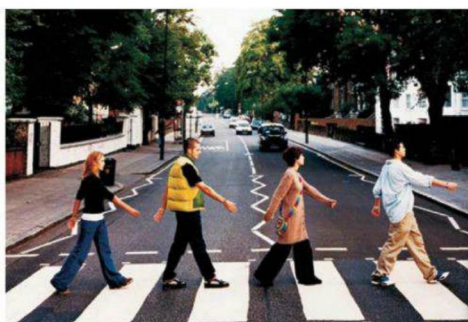
In 1655, employees of the Dutch East India Company planted the region's first vines in the shadow of Table Mountain; by 1659, they had produced the region's first rough-hewn wine blends. During the decades that followed, they continued to develop farms as a source of wine

and produce to take on lengthy sea voyages to the East Indies and Europe. French Protestant refugees began arriving in the late 1680s, bringing viticultural finesse. Taking advantage of the region's Mediterranean-like climate and Southern Hemisphere sun, they laid the ground-

work for what would become world-class wines.

Under 20th-century apartheid, government restrictions and trade embargoes stalled South Africa's wine industry. But the 1994 dawn of democracy ushered in a new era for the nation's wine-makers, too: International-style wines, from Malbecs to Chardonnays, now find a wider market, and the industry has made

strides toward ethnic inclusivity. These days, Wellington's **Diemersfontein** estate wins awards for its Pinotage and also helps farmworkers become shareholders in its empowerment project. On Wemmershoek Mountain, **Freedom Hill** symbolizes a historical dichotomy: You can enjoy ostrich carpaccio and Shiraz overlooking a prison; at its gates, Nelson Mandela finally walked free. —J.C.



EXPERIENCE

A Magical Mystery

Sure it's a cliché, but still, there's something special about crossing Abbey Road | **By FRANK DICESARE**

IT'S A QUIET SUNDAY morning and I'm stranded at London's Bond Street station. A section of the Underground's Jubilee Line is closed, and I need a bus to St. John's Wood and a friendly native to give me directions.

So I walk down Oxford Street and spot a newsstand vendor. "Which bus takes you to St. John's Wood?" I ask.

He opens his mouth to answer me, then pauses and gives me that inquisitive look of disapproval, like a father about to protest his teenager's attire. In that moment I realize he's on to me: I'm another tourist in search of an irresistible cliché. "You're not going to do that Abbey Road crossing rubbish, are you?" he asks.

I laugh in admission, and he rolls his eyes. "Oh, for the love of God," he says. "Don't do it, man."

Despite his discouragement, I remain undaunted. I tell him it's something I've wanted to do for years, a hajj of sorts that would make me the envy of my Beatles-fan friends back home in Massachusetts, the ones who have never been to London.

"You need better mates, lad," he jokes. "Why didn't you bring three of them along with you?" He then points to a bus stop about 100 yards away and tells me to take the Number 13 to Grove End Road. Abbey Road, he says, is only about a quarter mile from there.

When I get off the bus, I spot the St. John's Wood Underground Station and the Beatles Coffee Shop, so I know I'm close. I walk up Grove

End Road and follow it to a fork that bends right onto Abbey Road. There the familiar setting begins to unfold, and I can't help but smile. About 20 people have flanked the famous zebra crossing, some old enough to have bought *Abbey Road* when it was first released on vinyl and others too young to remember Duran Duran.

I look around. The neighborhood is suburban and posh, with leafy elms and horse-chestnut trees lining the sidewalks. I see stately apartment buildings and the white Georgian town house that is home to Abbey Road Studios, where the Beatles recorded most of their albums.

I stand on the corner and watch for a while: Two young women stop in the middle of the crossing and giggle as a friend snaps their picture. A silver-haired couple crosses, smiling and waving to someone who also fires off a few frames. If this

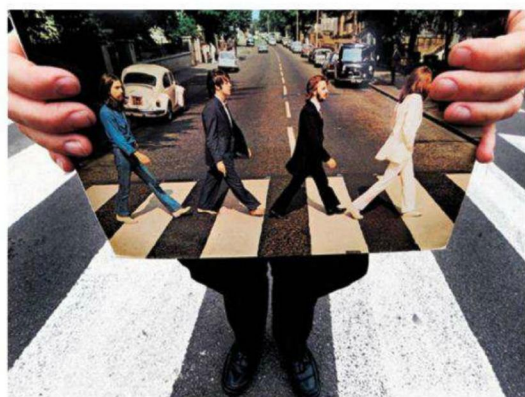
were any other crossing, everyone on both sides of the street would cross at the same time. At Abbey Road, however, clumps of crossers wait their turn to take a crack at those white stripes. They instinctively know that each traverse is a personal experience, not to be shared with strangers or even other generations: The young have arrived at a symbolic place from their parents' era; the old are sipping from a fountain of youth.

I walk across Grove End Road to a traffic island with an obelisk honoring Edward Onslow Ford, a sculptor of the Victorian period. From there I watch four young men huddle on the sidewalk as if to discuss the logistics of their crossing. Despite the oncoming traffic they begin their strides slowly and purposefully. They look as if they spent months arguing about who would have to walk in Ringo's place.

Then, as they reach the crossing's midpoint, they stop and strike their best album cover pose. But their stances look stiff and exaggerated, nothing at all like the Fab Four's smooth and seemingly effortless strides. I laugh out loud. Two of them look more like the Grateful Dead's Dancing Bears.

Now I want to cross, but I'm on the wrong side of the street. I walk—or, rather, jaywalk—across Abbey Road to get in position. Within seconds I'm staring out at the Neville Court apartment building, the same site the Beatles looked upon when they made their crossing nearly 43 years ago. Don't do it, man, I hear the Oxford Street vendor say in my mind. But I can't resist. I take my first step when a man in a shiny black Aston Martin stops at the crossing. He honks the horn and waves me along hurriedly, as if to say, Daft Yank, will you cross already!

I do, and without a hint of Beatle mimicry. I cross the way I believe a local would, and I feel knighted. All I needed was a moment in their footsteps. ■



All together now: Visitors to Abbey Road strike a Beatles pose (top), while a fan holds the oft-imitated album cover (above).



charlie chaplin's **venice**

One of the world's most entrancing cities becomes even more captivating when costumed revelers fill its tiny streets and grand piazzas during Carnevale. It is here that a star of the silent screen comes alive, antics and all

French merry-makers
(below) enjoy a classic
Venetian experience.
The author stands, in
her Little Tramp guise,
against the backdrop of
the island of San Giorgio
Maggiore (opposite).



by **SHEILA F. BUCKMASTER**
photographs by **DAVE YODER**

I'm back. Or, rather, Chaplin's back. This is the eighth time I am in Venice masquerading as the Little Tramp during Carnevale, the city's late winter ten-day party. Playing a role in Europe's best costume drama elevates my presence from observer to participant. As Charlie, I get to improvise, interact, and make people smile—against a backdrop unequaled on Earth, the city known as La Serenissima. Tooling around as a beloved icon in an enchanting place is as addictive as good gelato. ¶ It has been at least ten minutes since I've crossed paths with someone in costume—or in regular clothes, for that matter. How can it be that in the midst of this world-class event, a pretty corner of the city is empty except for an American woman of a certain age

dressed as Charlie Chaplin? Frankly, I'm not sure where I am. I don't carry a map (would Charlie?), though a map would be of little help on these tiny stop-and-start streets. And I've hit a dead end: The narrow Venice *calle* has stopped short at a small canal. I don't see any of those “*Per Rialto*” or “*Per San Marco*” signs, my navigational aids, on the sides of buildings. Turning back is really my only option. But I linger, looking at the ochers and vermilions that paint the water-worn buildings and the window boxes filled with red-edged sedum, which is returning to life just in time for this festive Venetian extravaganza that embodies European grace, glamour, mystery, and history.

Down a canal I spot a solitary gondola. “Black as nothing else on Earth except a coffin,” is how author Thomas Mann described these slender boats in *Death in Venice*. This one holds no passengers, just a gondolier maneuvering the craft with nonchalant skill. It will reach where I stand in a few moments. What would Chaplin do?

I'm not sure where the inspiration comes from, but I position myself so that when the gondola passes by, the gondolier sees me as his mirror image, my body tilted forward at the precise angle as his, my cane standing in for his long oar. I pull to his rhythm. I pull again. Then I'm spotted. The gondolier breaks into a smile. My Charlie is gleeful.

To get a response from one of these no-nonsense boatmen is a gift. It's all I need to turn around, twirl my cane, and make my way down the street with a bounce in my step. After all these years of dressing up as Charlie Chaplin at Carnevale, I'm closing in on getting it right.

WHY HAVE I MADE so many visits to Venice for Carnevale? And why the Chaplin costume? It comes down to love—love for Venice, love for masquerades (happy times for inner children, many of whom spare no expense in creating dazzling costumes),

love for the chance to be an ageless ham (in my genes; I'm related to comedian Billy Crystal and a mime named Adam Darius), and, of course, love for the timeless Little Tramp, one of entertainment's all-time greatest characters. Chaplin and I share a birthday: We were born on April 16—62 years apart. It's a serendipitous bond that helps justify my choice of alter ego. But the Little Tramp has always affected me: his propensity for mischief, the way he communicated through his eyes and gestures, his endearing underdog persona, his physical demeanor (we are not dissimilar in physical stature).

I am far from alone in this appreciation, as my experiences at many Carnevals have confirmed. Faces always light up when Charlie Chaplin comes into view. I light up in turn because when I am Charlie, I entertain and engage people in a most gratifying way—without having to audition, and following my own script.



THE LITTLE TRAMP'S roots can be traced to a Hollywood costume room, where Chaplin chanced upon the trappings—derby hat, jacket, loose trousers, shoes, mustache, cane—that defined his silent character. I came upon the beginnings of my costume, a bowler hat, in a cedar barn on a friend's New York farm. In the 1930s the farm had belonged to a tycoon—and clotheshorse. His shirts, suits, shoes, and hats still filled the small barn, along with a full-length mirror. Given the sizes of his clothes, the tycoon had been a small man, but he'd made it big in the cardboard-box business, I was told. The bowler, nestled in a red-and-blue hatbox closed with a leather strap, looked brand new. I took it from its nest and placed

Clockwise from left: Late winter winds challenge the poise of a costumed masquerader. During Carnevale, the streets of Venice become pop-up fashion runways lined with appreciative spectators—and a stage for Charlie Chaplin, here mimicking a gondolier.



A couple dances on the stage at Venice's restored Teatro La Fenice during a Carnevale ball. *Opposite, left to right:* A time-lapse shot taken from the Rialto Bridge reveals a hushed Grand Canal. Seafood pasta spills from a spider crab shell at Ristorante al Covo.



it on my head. It fit perfectly. I looked at myself in the mirror. I saw Chaplin. Big lace-up shoes, ill-fitting clothes, a mustache, and a cane would be easy to find.

My Chaplin debuted in Washington, D.C., on Halloween 1995, when I joined the festivities around Dupont Circle. My simple costume was lost, I thought, in a crowd of the otherworldly and odd. But I felt comfortable as the Tramp. It was when a young man in a business suit came up to me and said, “Hey, Chaplin, if there was a contest, you’d win” that I became hooked.

AFTER MY GONDOLIER encounter, it didn’t take me long to locate signs for San Marco. I followed their arrows—until a beautiful, mysterious figure in Campo Santo Stefano slowed me to a stop. I leaned forward, both hands on my cane, toes turned out, my head tilted at the same angle as the creature before me. We made eye contact, but the masked face yielded nothing beyond placid neutrality. Who was this person, I wondered? The creature’s gown of black and gold, intricately pleated, fitted, and dusting the ground, was clearly custom-made for the waif-thin human inside it. A large black hat outfitted with feathers and a parasol that matched the gown completed the outfit. Half a dozen bystanders took photographs as the woman (though of this I couldn’t be certain) moved in graceful slow motion, posing,

playing to her audience of young and old. What was her story?

Then, as I watched, she closed her parasol, placed its tip in front of her feet, and rested her two hands on top of the handle, mirroring my stance. This is the sort of connection Carnevale offers with regularity, staged in the world’s most enigmatic city. It is why I return.

In late winter it’s easy to travel to Venice using flier miles. One must, though, book a hotel room about six months ahead of time: Carnevale is popular with Europeans. At first I made the trip over a long weekend, one night in the air and three on the ground, which meant I could stay at a fancy splurge hotel, such as the Gritti, the Londra Palace, or Ca’ Pisani. Several years on I decided to make it a week, stopping first in a nearby city for a few days (best ones: Padua for art and the open-air market; Bologna for food; Vicenza—my favorite—for architect Andrea Palladio’s Greek-style theater). I always fly into Venice, take the train to the first-course town, where I spend a couple of nights, and then—relaxed and refreshed—board the train to Venice.

I’ve become a regular at Domus Orsoni, an inexpensive five-guest-room hotel housed in a historic mosaic factory near Venice’s old Jewish ghetto, an eight-minute walk from the train station. The rooms are spare and nicely designed, with beige linens and a single mosaic wall decoration; in my bathroom this year I find a shower lined with gold-leaf tiles. Domus Orsoni is where I become the Tramp, in just 15 minutes. Near Orsoni are the requisite souvenir

Why have I made so many visits to Venice for Carnevale? And why my Charlie Chaplin costume? It comes down to love, **love for Venice, for masquerades, and for the timeless Little Tramp.**





The Tiepolo Ball, a time machine of an event, magically disposes of the 21st century.



shops, a little bridge, a bakery where you can watch flour-dusty bakers make bread, a tiny food market, and sometimes a small fish market set up next to the water.

In Venice, in costume, I walk and walk. Window-shopping and people-watching—men in tricorne hats and buckle pumps, women in lavish dresses crafted from yards of lush fabrics—are like drugs for me. If I'm lucky, I find places that sell really good thin-crust pizza with *carciofi* (artichokes), soft panini bulging with tuna salad and chopped green olives, gelati without added color (beware the bright green pistachio ice cream!). After many years of Carnevale I'm not really interested in entertainment events organized by the tourist office; I spend my time ducking into shops and other places of interest, meeting locals, noshing on regional fare. The twist is that here, I'm part of other visitors' experiences.

I've come to expect a shower of smiles and comments as I walk through town: "*Perfetto*"... "*Complimenti*"... "*Ah, Charlie Chaplin. Bravo!*" I always turn in silent acknowledgment, to make the sort of eye contact not usually permissible with strangers. I smile, tip my hat, bow, and sometimes clown around. The grins widen. At least a dozen times a day I'm asked to pose for a snapshot, usually with someone standing at my side, happy to be in Charlie's aura. Even small children with no knowledge of the film star are magnetized by this little man with the mustache. Staying in character, I never speak. When people shoot questions at me—*Française? Inglese? Italiana?* (they almost never say *Americana*, very much in

spirit gum) in preparation for my lemon pasta with spider-crab meat, served in a crab shell (on a plate).

I make quick work of it and restick the mustache to my face. Eyeing the breadbasket, I give in to impulse, pick up two forks, and stab two bread rolls for Chaplin's "dancing rolls" routine from his 1925 film *The Gold Rush*. I kick one speared roll up at a time, Rockettes style—as sweet a cinematic scene as I can think of, and for a moment it's mine.

I FOLLOW LUNCH WITH A STROLL through Piazza San Marco and down a warren of streets and squares. Costumed revelers are everywhere, as are photographers documenting them. In piazzas, on the street, and in cafés, those in fancy dress prance, preen, and pose, drawing a storm of camera clicks. Occasionally Charlie Chaplin acts the provocateur and jumps into the frame; he even uses his cane to challenge sword-wielding gentlemen in powdered wigs. This sort of intrusion is usually met with an increase in clicks, but sometimes I'm treated to a high-decibel tongue-lashing from a photographer focused on the fancy costumes.

Many revelers have congregated on the stairs of the Accademia Bridge, which I cross on my way to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. This bastion of 20th-century art is known for its canvases by Braque, Picasso, and Kandinsky, among others, but I always pause at the marble plaque inscribed "Here lie my beloved babies,"

commemorating the 14 little dogs buried here—near Guggenheim's own ashes. Peggy Guggenheim was a mistress of whimsy, a wealthy American expat who held court among—and supported the work of—some of the most talented artists of the 1940s, '50s, '60s, and '70s. Whenever I see the famous photo of her in her star-frame glasses, I think of Carnevale.

CHARLIE IS A CREATURE of habit in Venice. Every visit to Carnevale includes a walk along the Zattere, where crowds give way to light. Wide open, this waterfront promenade was constructed in the 16th century as a landing dock. When the air is cold and the city's narrower streets lie in shade, the Zattere hoards the sun's rays. It also is home to several restaurants, pastry and gelato places, and the Billa supermarket, with perfect picnic makings: an assortment of cheeses and produce, fresh butter, yogurt, salami, cookies, and bread. More than once I've seen a pigeon marching the aisles here—Piazza San Marco refugees?

Charlie also always takes in a ride on a vaporetto (water bus) at night. In the dark, with electric lights twinkling, it seems that Venice's gorgeous buildings are whispering, "Sure, we have the threats of high water, pollution, and weathering, but can't you see our pride and our resilience? So far, we are survivors." In more ways than one, this is a moving experience for the Tramp, who is also a survivor.

MOST OF THE NIGHTS WHEN I'M in costume I angle for a seat at Caffè Florian, the Carnevale meeting place frequented by the more elegant and fashionable costumed merrymakers, many of them from France, England, and Germany. Florian, which opened its doors in 1720, sets the stage with genteel murals, gilt accents,

Carnevale guests provide spectacular photo ops: Costumed revelers at Caffè Lavena (opposite, top) enjoy a hot-chocolate party; morning light wraps a vision in orange (opposite, bottom) in pure mystery.



the minority at Carnevale), *Donna* (Woman)? *Uomo* (Man)?—I shrug, twirl my cane, and move on.

Carnevale's roots lie in the Middle Ages. By the 16th century, the city's *mascherari* (mask makers) were a well-regarded group. Their creations made it possible for nobility and commoners to interact, illicit lovers to unite anonymously, and gamblers to lose and win money invisibly (debauchery was a common theme at Carnevale). In the 1790s, during a period of decline in Venice, Carnevale all but disappeared. Resurgences followed until the event was outlawed by Mussolini's Fascist Party in the 1930s. The city brought Carnevale back in the 1970s as part of a tourism marketing plan, replete with corporate sponsorships and information kiosks.

One of the things I'd promised myself for this Carnevale was some fancy food. Not far from Piazza San Marco I find Al Covo, an untouristy, dependably excellent seafood restaurant. I've tucked my mustache into my pocket (next to a tiny bottle of adhesive





A Carnevale dandy appears to walk on water in flooded St. Mark's Square.

and tables just big enough for two cups of hot chocolate or flutes of champagne. This time, however, Charlie has other ideas. He is finding Florian too Carnevale cliché and wants to attend one of the high-class masquerade balls. It's something I've resisted because of the expense (upwards of \$350), which would also compel me to stay even if I wanted to leave early. Besides, I don't think it's the Tramp's milieu. (Actually, that's not true; he attends a snooty party in *City Lights*.)

But Charlie prevails. His choice: a minuet ball held in a gold-and-mirrors room at the luxe Hotel Danieli. Included in the ticket are dinner, dance lessons, and live chamber music. Around the white-clothed dinner table, a hundred or so elaborately costumed people speak in hushed tones as they trot out their best eating and drinking manners. Between courses they learn the minuet, courtesy of a professional Italian dance troupe. Many display a physical posture—elegant, erect—probably unknown to them in their day-to-day lives. The century definitely is not the 21st. These folks are living their best—timeless—selves.

"I think we all long for the elegance of the past," says a woman seated at my table dressed in a cleavage-enhancing gown of mauve watered silk. Our tablemates nod in an old-fashioned way. We sip wine, soak up the candlelight, and later dance slowly, deliberately, gracefully. The evening flies by.

IT'S MIDNIGHT BY THE TIME I head to Florian (old habits die hard). The place is packed, and those waiting to get in are restless. After ten unhappy minutes of being pushed and not catching the doorkeeper's eye (surely he'd let Charlie in if he saw him), I get a sharp elbow in the ribs from a "Greek god" repeating "*Permesso, permesso*"—let me by—as he makes his way to the door. I say nothing, elbow him back, and then leave the crowd. Feeling a little sorry for myself, I stroll slowly along some of my favorite

streets near the Fenice theater, past a woman dressed in a colorful crocheted Carnevale gown. I silently express my approval, and she is visibly grateful. Then, hearing voices, I dart into a tiny alley, where I find three men in overcoats and huge frizzy wigs singing an a cappella aria. Facing them, I lift my cane and conduct. Their performance inches up a notch. Several photographers take shots. The singers pull Charlie in next to them, into the picture. It occurs to me that this scenario of rejection and redemption is the most Chaplinesque I've experienced, ever.

The next morning, crack of dawn, cane in hand and costume packed in my duffel, I make the short walk to the vaporetto for the airport. I pass the fish market, where I spot shrimp, crabs, calamari, sole, swimmers I don't recognize. On a tray lie several fat eels. I see that at least one is wiggling around and think that maybe, as Chaplin might, I should throw the eels back into the water and slapstick my way out of there. In a cosmic coincidence, the fishmonger could pass for the sneering villain—that big guy with the mustache—who gives the Little Tramp big grief in his movies. I leave the eels just where they are.

On the vaporetto, enjoying my last bit of Venice, I see, at water level, the smooth moves of a gondolier as he tilts forward on his black boat to ease it through the water. My body instinctively tilts forward in response, and I'm already thinking about my next Carnevale. Then I notice a young Asian woman staring at me, looking from my eyes down to my cane and back. With a grin of discovery, she settles against her seat and says to me, "You're Charlie Chaplin."

Even though I am free to talk, all I do is smile.

Editor at large SHEILA BUCKMASTER and Mr. Chaplin plan to attend Carnevale in 2013. Italy-based DAVE YODER photographed Milan for our July-August 2011 issue.



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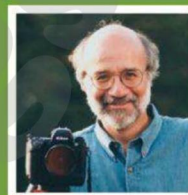
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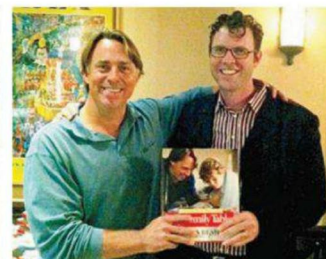


We are proud to announce that *National Geographic Traveler* received the World Tourism Award for our creation and promotion of geotourism. **Editor Keith Bellows** (pictured with award above) personally accepted the award in November at the World Travel Market in London, where we were specifically recognized for our unique Geotourism Map Guides that highlight community-based tourism, encourage sustainable travel, and build long-lasting partnerships with destinations.

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World's "Besh" Jambalaya

On his recent trip to New Orleans, *National Geographic Traveler's* Digital Nomad **Andrew Evans** joined award-winning celebrity chef **John Besh** in his home, where they whipped up a New Orleans classic, jambalaya. Check out Besh's new cookbook, ***My Family Table***, download his recipe, watch the cooking demo to relive Andrew Evans's New Orleans culinary adventure, and visit nationalgeographic.com/digitalnomad/louisiana.



It's NEW ORLEANS 
You're different here.



At Amansala, an eco-resort in Tulum, clay body treatments take place on the beach. Opposite: A Melipona bee exits the hive.

THE BUZZ IN MEXICO

**A LITTLE BEE PRIZED BY THE ANCIENT MAYA
PLAYS A STARRING ROLE IN A
SPIRITUAL SOJOURN**



By **MELINA GEROSA BELLOWS**
Photographs by **JACE RIVERS**

PHOTO CREDIT

I have always believed in signs.

The hand-painted plaque that hangs right near the reception area of the Nueva Vida de Ramiro, a beachside eco-resort named for a 17-year-old boy who was left for dead after a motorcycle accident, reads: “Dear Guest: We recommend for you to leave behind the stress, the hunger, and the negative vibrations, so that

you can enjoy this beautiful gift of nature.” It is a warm welcome.

“Clinically, Ramiro died. He can tell you,” says his father, Oscar Carreño, who greets me at check-in and tells me about his son after we square away the lodging details. “Then, after a yearlong coma, he came back to us. We celebrate two birthdays now.”

It’s auspicious that I am at a place of second chances, since I’m on a mission to follow the path of the *Melipona beecheii* bee, stingless and endangered. At risk of dying along with the insect is a beekeeping tradition that for centuries has been sacred to the Maya for its spiritual benefits.

Bees have symbolized the soul to many ancient cultures since the Stone Age. To the Maya, bees are imbued with mystical power,

So here I am in Tulum, the geographical equivalent of a hammock hanging between played-out Cancún to the north and less traveled Belize to the south. Vulnerable to overtourism for having some of the best beaches in the Americas, Tulum is partly shielded, located at the edge of Sian-Ka’an, one of Mexico’s first biosphere reserves and the country’s third largest protected natural area.

Tulum’s *zona costera*—coastal area—is a boho-chic enclave with accommodations ranging from \$39 a night for a spartan yoga ashram to ten times that amount for a luxury shelter by the sea. At Nueva Vida de Ramiro, with 30 beachside cabanas and suites, I follow a hot sandy path to my bungalow, which has a king-size bed draped with mosquito netting and an ornate green and yellow tiled bathroom. But the jaw-dropper is the view. Sinking back into a deck chair, I’m instantly mesmerized by the ribbons of turquoise Caribbean Sea unspooling before me.

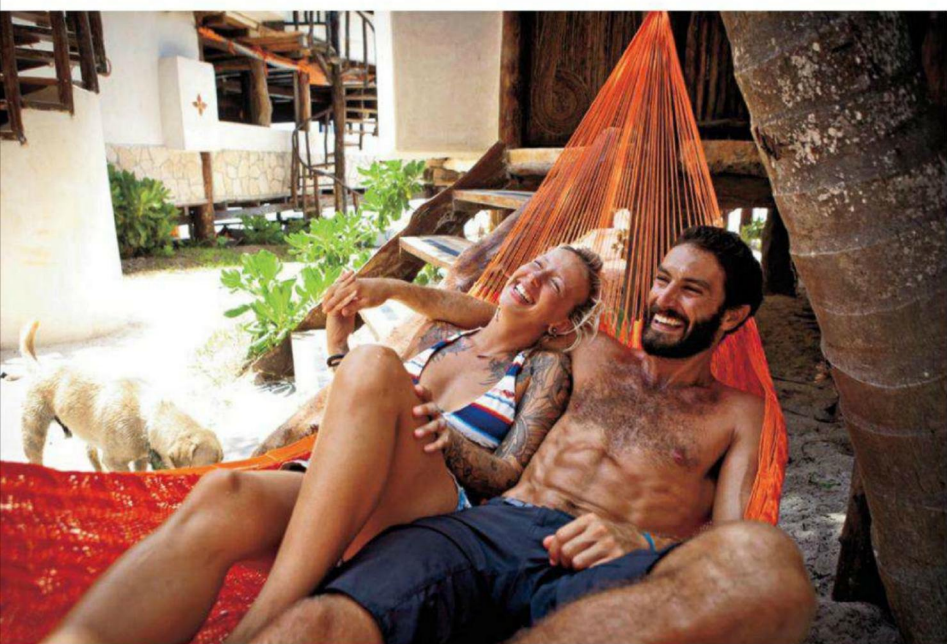
Because there are no power lines in this part of Tulum, keeping it functionally off-limits to megastructure developers, most accommodations have limited, if any, electricity—largely from solar panels and wind generators. One eventually succumbs to nature’s Wi-Fi here. Wind substitutes for air conditioning, candles for lightbulbs, and face-to-face encounters for social media. I quickly learn that Mateo’s, an outdoor eatery on the main drag, is the hub for a good cup of coffee, grouper tacos, and reliable insider info for other good places to eat.

I have lunch at El Tábano, a solar- and wind-powered restaurant decorated with art and furniture created by its waitstaff. The blackboard’s daily offerings dwindle by the hour because there are plenty of diners but no refrigerator for storing food. In the open-air kitchen, two white-aproned *abuelitas*—little grandmothers—prepare a feast

of honey-drizzled sliced pears with nuts and a chopped salad of local beans, cheese, and veggies that are so succulent they seem to pop in my mouth. We follow with velvety *marmoleado* (marble) cake and hibiscus tea. All in all, it’s a fine experience.

After lunch, I’m invited to tour El Tábano’s garden and elaborate composting station. Just about every single product—down to the cooking oil and garbage bags—is composted, recycled, or donated. “Living sustainably is perfectly possible. It’s not a dream,” says Israel Marmolejo, a waiter at El Tábano. “We make a living at it.”

The cliché “busy as a bee,” I’ve learned, is literal—some bee colonies must visit about two million flowers to make one pound of honey. I can’t compete with that. My activity on this trip, along



Beachgoers relax in a locally woven hammock at the Amansala resort, where offerings run from yoga and detox retreats to bikini boot camps.

said to appear as messengers between the living world and the underworld.

This is a personal quest. My name, Melina—which has Italian roots—means Little Honey. I find myself surprisingly undone by the state of these vulnerable bees. I want to see them, and the fact that they are found in Mexico, a short flight from my D.C. home, offers me the perfect excuse to slip my chronically overscheduled life and just go. With my very namesake in peril, how could I not hightail it to the Riviera Maya?



From left, above: A waitress stands in front of the menu board at El Tábano, a rustic restaurant that serves organic fare, much of it grown on-site. Rental bikes are plentiful around Tulum, offering an easy way to experience the beach and jungle landscapes. Wine made with local honey offers bee aficionados (and others) an unusual and tasty experience. Below: All is quiet on an inviting stretch of Tulum beach not far from the area's turtle nesting grounds.



Inviting in its simplicity,
a bungalow at Tulum's
Nueva Vida de Ramiro
hotel sports a traditional
thatched palapa roof.



with the bee research, will center on meditation. I'm drawn to the "I Heart Yoga" signs dotting the road and decide to check out Amansala, home to the Bikini Bootcamp (no thank you) and a haven for career women traveling solo.

The welcoming committee consists of three golden Labs and a Chihuahua, each wearing a faded bandanna. When I learn that local honey is used in Amansala's Maya clay-and-honey wrap meditation, I join a dozen women of all ages on the beach for the experience.

"Clay is one of the oldest healing remedies," says Melissa Perlman, the hotel's proprietor. "It acts like a sponge, detoxifying anything you're ready to let go of—spiritually as well as physically. Honey acts as a natural moisturizer."

An instant sisterhood, we coat ourselves with the mustard-colored goop. We're getting not only each other's backs but butts and thighs, too. Melissa leads us to the water's edge, where we close our eyes and listen to a healing visualization. Her voice wafts on the wind. The sun bakes us into mummies. My skin pulls so tightly it hurts.

"Call to mind something you want to get rid of, something you are ready to release," Melissa says.

The words "past unmet needs" and "wanting to know what's next" enter my mind. "Set your intention on making room for something new," says Melissa, closing the meditation and releasing us to the waves.

"Big love!" I think as I dive into the water. We bob like corks, scrubbing ourselves with seaweed. The reptilian head of a mama turtle pops up for the occasional breath.

While the mosquitoes are in bulk supply, I haven't encountered

a single bee. So I decide to do the next best thing and visit a shrine dedicated to Ah Muzen Cab, a Maya bee god, at the nearby archaeological site of Cobá. I pay \$3 for a rental bike at the entrance and pedal the rutted path to 138-foot-high Nohoch Mul, the tallest pyramid on the Yucatán Peninsula.

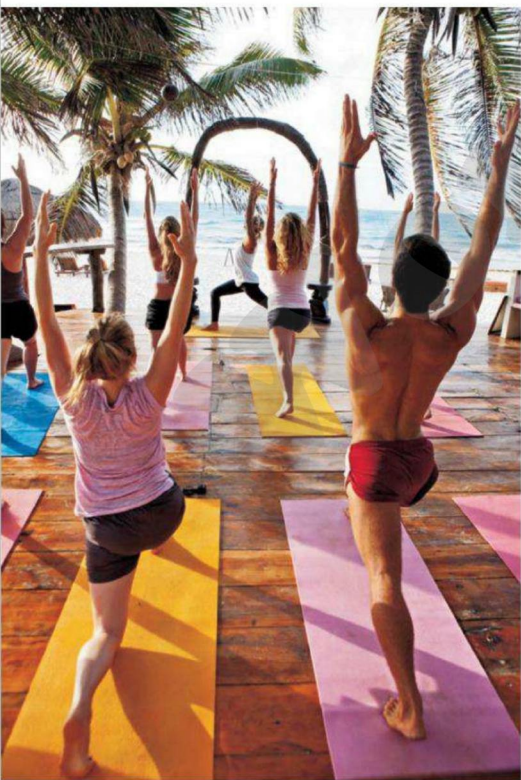
At Nohoch Mul I lean my bike against a tree and walk through a Q-tip forest of white, skinny cypresses. Stairmaster-style, I cover the 120 steps to the top of the temple and survey the uninterrupted view of lumpy, verdant jungle. It's amazing that almost every elevation I see is not a hill—the Yucatán Peninsula is flat—but an unexcavated temple. I head back down and linger in the temple's doorway, beneath what may be the hieroglyph of Ah Muzen Cab, a crude figure also known as Descending God and Diving God. The ancient Maya worshipped the bee god for survival. Honey was important medicinally (believed to alleviate infection, asthma, cataracts, and more) and to the economy: It was a lucrative commodity that was traded from town to town.

As the park closes for the night, I cross the town square and stop at the lagoon to watch kids on the pier playing with snapping crocodiles. In the back of a T-shirt shop I discover a pottery workshop led by Agustín Villalba. The charismatic Argentine artist came to Mexico four years ago to learn the ancient Maya craft, only to discover that few knew the skill. His goal: to resurrect the art form by teaching it to the town's future—its children.

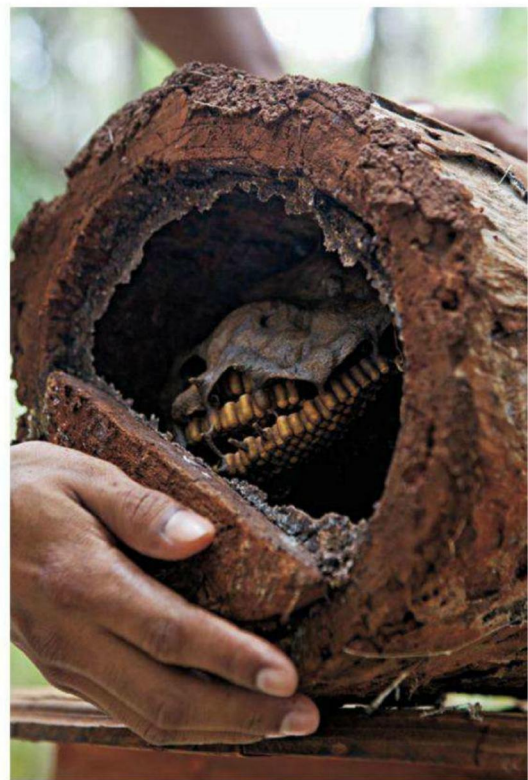
"There's no electricity here," Villalba says. "The kids come to the studio because this is their TV and Xbox."

As the light fades, a dozen of us sit at a picnic table and thump and pound away at stiff, tawny clumps of clay just pulled from the lagoon where I saw the crocodiles. Next to us, a table of local

The ancient Maya worshipped the bee god for survival. Honey was important medicinally and to the economy: It was a lucrative commodity that was traded from town to town.



From left: Yoga offers a balanced way to start the day on the Riviera Maya; bold blue and white markings identify a participant in a Maya ceremony near Cobá; stingless bees often nest inside hollow tree trunks.



The interior of the hive looks like brown mushrooms covered with thousands of bees. One sails out, and I'm surprised by how small these insects are—fly-size, really.

kids, ages three to eleven, are carving while they chatter away.

"Jorgito, give them a hand," says Villalba in Mayan, waving over a dimpled, smiling child.

"Here comes tech support!" jokes an American man at my table, clearly charmed. We learn that Jorgito is one of nine children. His parents support the family solely by harvesting honey, which Villalba sells at the studio in recycled water bottles. I buy two and hope for the best at customs.

One by one, each of the kids comes over to weigh in on our progress. By the laughter here it's clear this is a special place. The studio is helping to preserve the indigenous art form, and the cooperative has helped 72 families feed themselves—part of the cycle of sustainability.

"Over the past four years, the money made by selling pottery has helped save more than 2,000 acres of farmland from being sold," Villalba says.

Afterward, it's time for some theater: a reenactment of the first parts of the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of local Maya. Drums beat as Villalba leads us through the torch-lit darkness, down into a pit. The wet, eerie atmosphere is dreamlike. The performers wear nothing but body and face paint and animal skins with jangly shells. While very basic, the overall effect is as dramatic as any *Lion King* production.

We sit on stone benches, slather ourselves in bug repellent, and watch as two brothers mix it up with a red, dragon-like god of the underworld. In order to save their souls, the brothers must win at a game of *chaah*, an ancient Maya ball game. The tension mounts as the sweat-drenched actors labor to maneuver the eight-pound ball up a stone ramp and through a hole without using their hands, feet, or heads. When the brothers finally manage the athletic feat, using their elbows—"Hooray!" We've all jumped to our feet to cheer.

"The performers are five generations of a family that lives an hour inside the jungle, and they are the purest Maya you can find," explains Villalba. "They all used to be farmers, but now they're full-time actors." When they appear after the show, wearing T-shirts, cutoffs, and trendy running shoes, they seem surprised by our respectful interest in their performance.

Respect for indigenous traditions matters in the natural world as well. Disregard for time-honored ways is the main threat to the native bees. In addition to starvation (due to deforestation, hurricanes, and competition for food), the bees are threatened by the possible loss of vital trade secrets. Most of the last remaining beekeepers are old men and women living in rural Yucatán, and practically no one is inheriting their knowledge.

Keepers of stingless bees are not easy to find. However, I sniff around a bit and find myself in luck. Chaperoned by translators, I venture a few hours south of Tulum, way off the grid to a jungle

town called San Antonio Segundo. On the dirt road we meet 80-year-old Don Porfirio Chimal Kanchoc and his 32-year-old son, Julián. They look like the same person with opposite hair color. Since the family speaks only Mayan, we smile and nod hello. Neither man makes eye contact as we politely shake hands. After the introductions, Don Porfirio leads us through a green tangle of trees, stopping to rip sweet orange leaves and demonstrate how we should scrub our hands and arms before approaching the hives in order to repel other insects.

"There are some 40 species of stingless bees, and they produce the finest honey," he explains through the translators. "But the *Melipona* is being put out of business by the more productive European and Africanized honeybees, which were introduced

decades ago." I can hear the buzzing 20 feet before we reach the apiary. Under a *palapa*—a thatched-roof hut—the hives are housed in logs set up in the shape of a pyramid. Julián grabs an iron bar and pries one open for me.

I peer in, anxious to finally see my *Melipona* soul sister. The interior of the hive looks like brown mushrooms covered with thousands of bees. One sails out, and I'm surprised by how small these insects are—fly-size, really. Their enormous green eyes on the little bodies remind me of mod sunglasses. As more bees shoot toward me, I flinch before remembering that they are stingless.

And, according to Don Porfirio, some work on an abbreviated schedule.

"The European bee awakes at 5 a.m. And if there's a full moon, the Africanized bee will work through the night," he explains. "But the *Melipona* bee gets up around noon. Plus it is very selective. It will, it seems, only take nectar from the

most beautiful flowers."

Casually, Julián yanks out a hunk of honeycomb. It feels like a violation, as if he just drew a mustache on the "Mona Lisa." To me, this is a sacred site. To him, it's a barn with a cow to be milked. He pinches off a bit of pasty orange pollen for me to taste, along with a drizzle of the precious white honey, which I lick off my fingers. It tastes earthy and slightly citrusy.

Afterward, I'm invited to the family's home, which is made of cinder blocks and corrugated roofing. Julián's young wife stays in the background nursing a baby as two other young kids swing on the indoor hammock. Thick wood smoke perfumes the air.

Don Porfirio pulls leaves off a nearby *chechén* tree and blesses a 30-gallon paint container. After his prayer, he removes the lid. It's not paint, I realize, but *balché*, the revered wine made with fermented tree bark and honey from the first extraction. It is shared only with permission from the *Melipona* gods. He offers a sip to his five-year-old granddaughter. She declines, making a face. No wonder. The stench—think bar floor strained through a World Cup sweat sock—reaches me before the plastic teacup.





Amid bougainvillea flowers and locally embroidered textiles, a shaman (*above*) blesses beehives during a *Melipona* bee ceremony held at Xel-Há, a park that showcases cultural and natural attractions. Basic beachside yoga retreats (*below*) are sprouting up all along the beaches around Tulum.



I gag. Sternly, I remind myself that this is an honor: Balché may be consumed only if authorized by a shaman. I say a little prayer of my own that I'll manage to get the mead down without humiliating myself or offending anyone. Gamely, I sip. Sort of an acquired taste, I decide a half cup in. By the time I finish, I notice that it has settled my upset stomach. I'm up for another round, but it's time to head back to the beach.

Unfortunately, most Mexicans don't have access to the keepers of stingless bees and their traditions. However, the ritualistic celebration of the hives can be glimpsed, once in June and once in December, at an aquatic park, Xel-Há, which celebrates Mexican culture and wildlife.

At Xel-Há I join locals—about a hundred of them, of all ages, most dressed in white—to watch a condensed version of the eight-hour bee ritual. The shaman, a middle-aged man in crisp white linen, starts the ceremony. He kneels at the altar, which is laden with offerings, including 13 loaves (each made of 13 layers of corn

and former home of an Italian duchess in the nearby resort village of Xpu-Ha.

Outside, a clay pot boils up an infusion of herbs to be used for the treatments, while a brindled cat named Alfonsina lolls in the shade. To begin, my Maya therapist, Lulu, leads me around the circular spa, smoking me with copal—tree resin—to purify my soul and take my prayers to the gods. After we complete the circle, she positions me on a large palm leaf and instructs me to close my eyes while she invokes the spirits with the sounds of chanting and prayers. Then, on the table, Lulu works me over with lukewarm honey, oil, and red flowers. Her magical touch takes me to another place. When it's over and I open my eyes, I have to remember where I am. Lulu meets me outside the room with a hot clay pot of homemade apple-and-cinnamon tea.

"Your energy is *mucho mucho*..." she says, pointing to the gooseflesh on her arm. I notice that her black eyes glint with tears. This touches me deeply. A massage is about receiving. I had no clue it could also be energetically reciprocal. To break our language barrier, I hug her in thanks. Lulu envelops me with her tiny soft body as if I am a newborn.

I'm grateful that the local honey is being used at upscale spas. The key to *Melipona*'s survival is to create demand for its honey. It's one thing to try to preserve a cultural tradition, quite another to help the local population thrive. But there is hope: Since 2006, the nonprofit, Mexico-based conservation and sustainable-development organization Razonatura has helped teach women in the little town of Chiquilá, near Cancún, the art of tending *Melipona*. At this point, the collective is producing less than 250 pounds of honey per year—but the value of the honey is four to five times that of honey yielded from European or Africanized bees. The collective is also learning how to make soaps and lotions from the precious honey, which will augment its income.

Will the little *Melipona* bee get its groove back? I don't know. But the stingless bee certainly helped me get mine back. Since ancient times, honey has been regarded as good for health, a "giver of life." Getting as close as humanly possible to this sweetness through taste, massage, celebration, worship, and even female bonding has been divine in the very sense of the word.

I feel changed. Surrendering to the quest, glimpsing Maya culture, and giving myself over to the journey have been a balm to my soul. The experience reconnected me with the healing joy of being present, just as the hand-painted plaque at the hotel check-in instructed.

And then it hits me. That's the sign that little *Melipona*, messenger of the gods, has been trying to deliver all along. The missive is so literal, I can't help but feel humbled—and connected. The message is simple and sweet.

Just be.

MELINA GEROSA BELLOWS last wrote about monarch butterflies and their habitat in Mexico in the November-December 2009 issue of *Traveler*. Seattle-based photographer JACE RIVERS has taken pictures in more than three dozen countries.



A bright yellow feline figure, locally crafted, presides over one of the many casual, colorfully decorated eateries dotting Tulum's beachside byways.

tortillas), 13 bowls of soup, and 13 candles. Among the Maya, 13 is an auspicious number. The shaman's young acolytes transport the *hobón*—the container holding the hives—to a podium. They tilt the log, and the honey drips into a gourd. Everyone "aahs," for there have been years when the hives did not yield honey.

After more prayers, the shaman blesses the food—and the feast begins. We dig into hunks of tortilla and *chok'ob*, a traditional Yucatán chicken dish. Families mill about eating, taking pictures, sipping watermelon juice. It is a remarkably informal staged performance—a fascinating preamble to a great picnic. But at least the ceremony represents an effort to preserve and share ancient traditions.

As my trip comes to an end, I decide on one last sweet treat for myself, a honey massage that has been designed to honor the Maya love goddess. Nothing more than clever marketing? Maybe I'm an easy target, but I feel as though I'm visiting a witch's apothecary at the organic Aroma Spa at Esencia, an upscale beachside retreat



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traditions and country hospitality

Japan's Past Perfect

BY DON GEORGE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MACDUFF EVERTON



Manager Paul Cato
(at left) chats with
visitors at Chiiori,
a renovated farm-
house turned inn.

I'm sitting on the polished wooden steps of a 300-year-old farmhouse in Japan's Iya Valley, looking out on a succession of mountain folds densely covered in deep green cedars. Skeins of morning mist rise from the valley floor, hang in wispy balls in the air, and tangle in the surrounding slopes. No other houses are visible. The only sound is the drip of predawn rain from nearby branches and from the farmhouse's roof of thick thatch. The faint scent of charcoal from last night's hearth rides on the air. I feel as if I'm in the hermit's hut in a 17th-century ink-and-brush painting.



Storm clouds threaten the island tranquility of Shimodamari Port, a fishing village on the west coast. A few miles inland, farmers (opposite) arrange harvested rice to dry on bamboo racks near Seiyō City.

“Extraordinary, isn’t it?” says Paul Cato, the expatriate manager of this farmhouse, inn, and living-history classroom. “There are mornings when I wake up here and wonder what century I’m in.”

We’re at Chiiori, the project of an American author named Alex Kerr, who fell in love with this part of Japan when he was a student in Tokyo in the 1970s and bought this farmhouse as a way to preserve the traditions he treasured.

The Iya Valley is set deep in the mountainous interior of Shikoku, the smallest of Japan’s four principal islands, cradled between Kyushu to the west and the main island of Honshu, with the Inland Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south.

I FELL IN LOVE WITH SHIKOKU in the 1970s too, on a visit with my then girlfriend, Kuniko, who brought me to her family home here from the university in Tokyo, where we were both living. On that trip I discovered a Japan I hadn’t known existed: A place of farms and fishing villages, mountainside shrines and seaside temples, rugged seacoasts and forested hills, time-honored traditions and country kindness. Thirty-two years later, I’ve come back with Kuniko to celebrate our 28th anniversary and to see if I can rediscover that special place. While Kuniko relishes time at home with her family, I’m on a solo sojourn tracing pilgrims’ trails and winding one-lane roads in search of this lost Japan.

Kuniko’s hometown, Johen, is a tranquil place of about 9,000 people in the southwestern corner of Shikoku. Although it is a main island, Shikoku is what most Japanese consider *too i inaka*, the deep countryside. Though there are a handful of famous sights—

the 17th-century castles of Matsuyama and Kochi, Ritsurin Koen garden in Takamatsu, and the hot spring spa of Dogo Onsen in Matsuyama—and though three bridges now link the island to Honshu (the first opened in 1988), Shikoku remains a mystery to the average Japanese. It’s even more mysterious to foreigners, who rarely venture this far off the beaten path.

On my first visit here, I literally fell off the beaten path. Everything was going beautifully until Kuniko and I reached her family’s house, which was located on a lane that seemed narrower than our rental car, with a ditch on one side and a stream on the other. When I tried to turn the corner, a rear wheel slipped into the ditch. And that’s how I met my future parents-in-law, asking if they could help me lift my car from the trench. Kuniko’s mother, Obaachan, recalls this moment 32 years later, as the entire family gathers outside their home to bow me off on a sunny September day. “Don-san, stay away from the ditches!” she calls in Japanese as I pull away.

I’m bound for Cape Ashizuri, the island’s southernmost tip. Last night, over sushi, beers, and a shiny new Shikoku map, I had asked Kuniko’s parents and two brothers to tell me where to go to find the heart of Shikoku. Kuniko’s older brother, Nobuhisa, had nominated Cape Ashizuri, the same place he took us on my first visit. “Be sure to take this road,” he said, tracing a squiggle with his chopstick. “For me, that’s the best way to see what we call *aoi*



kuni Shikoku: 'blue country Shikoku.' Blue sky, blue mountains, blue rice paddies, blue sea." Blue rice paddies? He noted my quizzical look. "In old Japanese, aoi means both blue and green."

A half hour out of Johen (which is now part of Ainan Town), I'm already immersed in classic aoi scenery: a deep blue sky over evergreen-cloaked mountains, sloping down to emerald rice paddies with a silver-glinting river ribboning through. There are hints of human presence: handmade scarecrows in straw hats placed among the paddies, wooden farmhouses darkened by age, and a diminutive Shinto shrine, with its stout torii gateway and sacred rope, set at the foot of one slope.

After a couple of hours driving through a thousand shades of green, I stop in a one-street hamlet of about two dozen wooden homes. The main street curves along the seafront, past a placid row of shops: vegetable market, hardware store, hair salon, bakery. Behind one house three men in wide-brimmed straw hats tend a fire of backyard vegetation, the smoke stinging the air. At the end of the street a bent old woman in a sunbonnet pushes a three-wheeled walker. She smiles and bows as I pass. Three kids pedal by on bikes. In the half-moon harbor, fishing boats gently

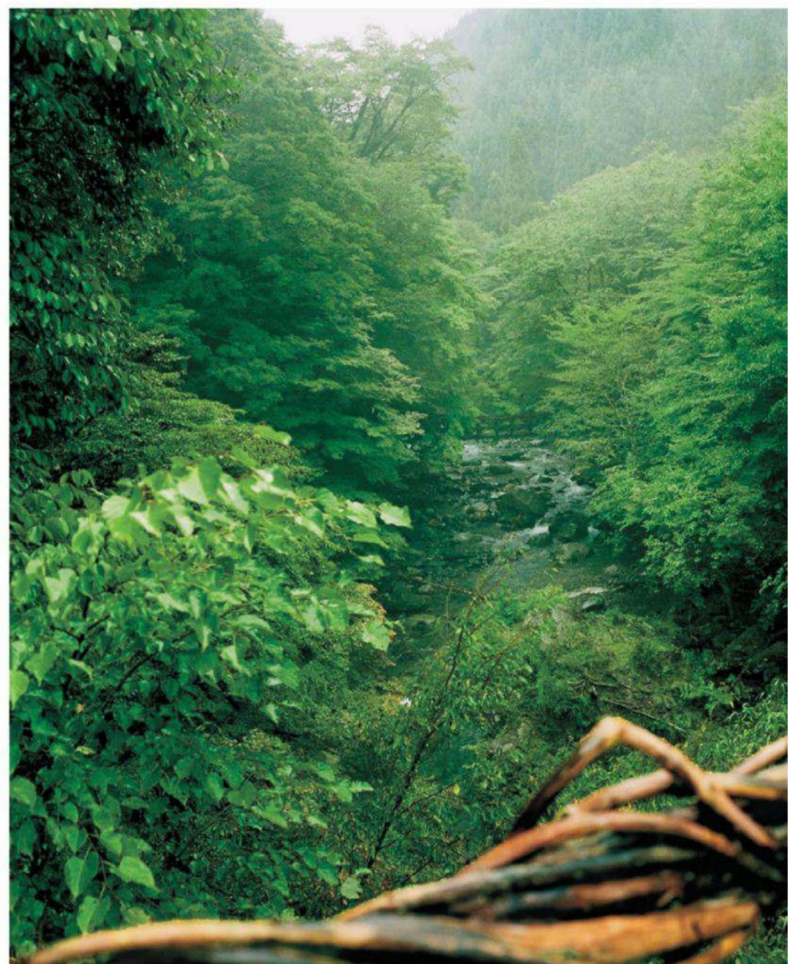


Shikoku remains a mystery to the average Japanese. It's even more mysterious to foreigners, who rarely venture this far off the beaten path.





A Swedish visitor soaks in hot springs located on a ravine floor 558 feet below Hotel Iya Onsen. At Okuiya Niju Kazurabashi (right), locals playfully refer to a rare paired set of vine bridges as a married couple. Centuries of smoke from floor hearths have blackened the rafters at Chiiori (opposite).



rock. A thickly forested hillside rises steeply behind the houses, and gray cemetery obelisks zigzag in patches of cleared land up the slope. The summer air is still.

“Wah!” the grandmotherly woman behind the counter at the bakery says when I walk in. “A foreign guest!” She is about five feet tall and is dressed in the region’s traditional blue and white dyed *kasuri* pants and a floppy floral shirt. Her wrinkled, tanned face crinkles into a bright smile.

I ask if she grew up in this village. “Oh, yes, I was born here and have lived here all my life.” She counts on her fingers. “Seven decades.”

Has she ever thought about living anywhere else?

“Oh no!” she quickly responds. “Why would I want to live anywhere else?”

How about the young people, I ask, do they stay here, too? “Ah, well, the young people,” she sighs, “they don’t think there’s much to do here, so they all go to Nagoya or Kobe. They prefer the city. But I like it here; it’s peaceful and close to nature. For me, there’s no reason to leave.”

When I pass her some coins to pay for my canned ice coffee, she waves them away. “I’m honored to have a foreign guest,” she says. “Thank you for visiting Shikoku. Have a safe journey!”

Threading my way through fish-pungent villages, I eventually reach the tip of Cape Ashizuri and stand on the lookout point where Kuniko, Nobuhisa, and I stood 32 years before. I gaze at the gleaming white lighthouse, the craggy coast, the cedar-covered mountains sliding into the sea. This is a picture I carried in my head and heart all those years—pristine, peaceful, offering a wideness

of sight and soul that you never find in urban Japan. I call Kuniko and describe the scene. “Yes,” she says, as if she’s known this all the time, “that’s why I was able to marry you. Shikoku opens up your mind and your heart like no other place in Japan can.”

That night I stay in a nearby inn with a sweeping view of rice fields, mountains, and one of the longest white-sand beaches in Japan—and an owner whose own mind and heart seem as expansive as the view. “Welcome to Kaiyu Inn!” Mitsu Ohkada booms in English when I walk into the open-to-the-breezes lobby. He started the inn after years working at an international hotel chain in Bali, he tells me. “I love the slow pace and the tranquillity here—and of course the nature. Do you know aoi kuni Shikoku?” I do.

The next day, I’m white-knuckling along one-lane roads through the green, steeply sloping mountains of the Iya Valley. Villages are carved into occasional clearings on the mountainsides, and I pass farmers hoeing and digging, with occasional bushels of barley standing on hardscrabble plots. It’s late afternoon when I reach Chiiori, the renovated farmhouse cum inn where Kuniko’s younger brother, Fumiyaki, had urged me to stay.

Chiiori is a vision straight out of a Japanese storybook: a long, low wooden farmhouse crowned by a shaggy roof of two-foot-thick thatch.

“*Trasshaimase!* Welcome!” calls Paul Cato, the American resident manager, as he slides open the inn’s wooden doors. The interior of the house is exquisitely empty, one open room about 40 feet long by 20 feet wide, all gleaming wooden floorboards, thick exposed wooden beams, rice paper lanterns, and rice paper screens. Stepping over the threshold is like stepping back in time.



A sudden wind sways the vine bridge, slick with the day's rain. Tentatively I set a sandaled foot on the first plank, wishing I'd brought better footwear.

hang the leaves from the rafters to dry inside, over the smoking hearths. That's why there's no ceiling. They were ingenious in other ways, too." He lifts a broad wooden floorboard to reveal a pile of stored potatoes. "Alex loved the farming customs and old-fashioned peace he found in Iya, and he wanted to preserve them. Volunteers have come from throughout Japan and around the world to live here, work the crops, and maintain the farmhouse, and local farmers teach the traditional techniques. So this truly is a piece of old Japan."

One modern feature of Chiiori is excellent Wi-Fi, and I get an

"That's actually true," Cato says when I mention this feeling. "Chiiori is an actual 300-year-old farmhouse. Author Alex Kerr had fallen in love with traditional Japanese architecture and aesthetics, and his dream was to restore this place so that it resembled as closely as possible a typical Iya farmhouse of three centuries ago."

"It's not just about the architecture; it's the way of life, too. Look up," Cato says. Instead of a ceiling, I can see all the way to the roof's blackened rafters. "In the old days," he explains, "tobacco was a primary crop. Because of the wet climate, the farmers would

e-mail from Kuniko. “We’re following your route,” she writes. “How is Iya and Chiiori? Fumiyaki says it’s the most peaceful place on Shikoku.”

As dusk shrouds the mountains, Cato and I slice and dice radishes, onions, cucumbers, carrots, potatoes, and pumpkins from Chiiori’s garden for a rich stew that we eat around the charcoal-fired hearth. Then I snuggle into thick futons under 300-year-old wooden beams and 25-year-old thatch. I tap out a sleepy e-mail: “Please thank Fumiyaki for his great advice: Staying here is an immersion course in the relation between nature and man.”

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON, I arrive at Okuiya Niju Kazurabashi, or “double vine bridge.” Except for a lone ticket taker, the site is absolutely deserted. I descend a hundred steps into a primeval scene of thick foliage and floating clumps of mist. Two “wedded” bridges appear spectrally—each a set of intertwining vines stretched across a rushing river. The higher and longer bridge is traditionally known as the male; the lower, shorter one the female. Fog rises from the river and obscures the surrounding hills.

Of all the sights in Iya Valley—the mountains and temples and hot springs—this is the one other place Fumiyaki told me I had to go. “The bridge was said to be built by the Heike clan in the 12th century, when they fled from Kyoto after losing a civil war with the

Genji clan,” he told me. “The Heike settled deep in the mountains of Iya, and they built these vine bridges for protection, because they could easily destroy them if the Genji ever approached. Only two vine bridge sites remain. The other one is touristy, but you can get a sense of old Shikoku at this one.”

A sudden wind sways the vine bridge, slick with the day’s rain. Tentatively I set a sandaled foot on the first vine-entwined wooden plank, wishing I’d brought better footwear. I shift my weight, take a deep breath, and set my other foot on the second plank. Swoop!

My sandal slips, and suddenly I’m sprawled on my rump and my foot is wedged between wooden planks. I try to wiggle it out, and the vines claw and cling, lodging it deeper. The woods, the mist, the ghosts of the Heike warriors, all close in on me.

“The people of Iya still believe that gods live in the mountains,” Fumiyaki had said, and now I understand why. I can hear them laughing in the trees.

Finally I find a way to detach my foot from my sandal, scratch and scrape my foot through the planks, and extricate my sandal from the bridge. But I can’t leave—how could I face Kuniko’s family? With the vines dancing and the wind creaking the boughs, I carefully place my re-sandaled foot and clutch the vine-looped handrails with both hands. Focus, focus. Slowly I step from plank to plank, the bridge bouncing and creaking. After a heart-



pounding ten minutes, I jump triumphantly onto the other side. I think of Fumiyaki and raise a silent prayer to the mountain gods.

IN THE MAIN HALL at the Zentsuji temple complex, incense spirals into the air and monks intone a solemn chant while a half dozen elderly visitors bow and pray; outside, another young monk assiduously sweeps the dirt ground with a broom made of twigs. At one end of the complex, Japanese tourists led by a flag-wielding guide admire a soaring five-story pagoda; nearby, a quartet of meticulously coiffed women ooh and aah before a stupendous camphor tree that looks to be older than the temple itself.

Zentsuji is the birthplace of the beloved Buddhist scholar and high priest Kobo Daishi, who built the temple in the early ninth century. This is the place Kuniko's father, Ojiichan, had said I should see. "To understand Shikoku," Ojiichan said, "you have to understand the pilgrimage, which follows in the footsteps of Kobo Daishi. There are 88 temples all around Shikoku in the circuit, and pilgrims—*o-henro-san*—walk from temple to temple to gain wisdom and purity. I remember when I was a little boy the pilgrims would approach our door—you could hear the *ting-ting* of the bells they carried—and my mother would tell me to bring them rice and oranges. That's why we welcome strangers on Shikoku."

A shop displaying books, beads, walking sticks, and other

This picture I carried in my head and heart all those years—pristine, peaceful, pure, offering a wide-ness of sight and soul that you never find in urban Japan.

temple, the priest writes the name of the temple on a page and then stamps it with the temple's stamp," the father says. They turn the pages for me. "Every time I make the pilgrimage, I feel lighter. It refreshes my sense of the meaning of life. I feel like I can do anything after I've finished the journey," he says.

pilgrimage accoutrements entices me, and I lose all sense of time perusing a children's picture book showing the life and legends of Kobo Daishi. When I emerge, pilgrims are everywhere, clad in identical conical bamboo hats and loose, immaculate white jackets and pants, all carrying straight, sturdy staffs. I approach one couple who look to be a father and daughter. Youthful energy radiates from the father's time-lined face. When I ask them about the pilgrimage, the daughter reaches into a shoulder pouch and carefully lifts out a book with a cover of gold and red silk. "At every

Near Cape Ashizuri, the sandstone shoreline has eroded over millions of years to form rock shapes that resemble giant fallen rods of bamboo.





“Of course,” the daughter says, “this is only our fourth circuit. That o-henro-san there”—and she points to a wizened man draped in colorful sashes and dressed all in black—“is doing the route for the 333rd time!”

As I watch the pilgrims pray and pose for pictures, I realize that they are a benedictory presence on Shikoku. In their fervent, plodding path, they remind us to slow down and keep a higher spiritual purpose in mind. And I realize too the deep truth of Ojiichan’s words, that the tradition of hospitality, kindness, and openness on the island must trace its roots to the pilgrim’s own openhearted quest.

I tour the island for two more days, stopping to feel the texture of old straw-and-clay farmhouses, idling in serene fishing villages, bowing to pilgrims I pass. At a hot spring spa, a half dozen middle-aged women befriend me and insist on paying for my dinner. When I’m lost at a coastal intersection, a truck driver goes a half hour out of his way to deliver me to the right highway. At a roadside snack stand, the proprietress asks me if I’m doing the pilgrimage and when I tell her no, that I’m looking for the heart of Shikoku, she exclaims, “Then you’re a pilgrim, too!” and presents me with a strawberry shaved ice.

On the fifth day, I arrive back at Johen just as dusk is falling. The family is waiting for me with a feast of fresh-from-the-harbor

Buddhist pilgrims dressed in white progress around Shikoku in an 88-temple circuit that includes (counterclockwise from above): Kongo-fukuji (no. 38), Kan-jizaiji (no. 40), and Zentsuji (no. 75).

katsuo sashimi and grilled *aji*, and fresh-from-the-garden mushrooms, tomatoes, and cucumbers.

As we sit on tatami mats around a low table, Obaachan fastens me with her bright eyes. “Well,” she says, “did you find the heart of Shikoku?”

“I did,” I say, and they all look at me expectantly. “But it’s not one particular place. I found it in farmers’ fields and fishermen’s villages, and in the pilgrims who give a sense of the sacred to daily life. And I found it over and over in everyday people who greeted me with a wide spirit and heartfelt hospitality.”

For a second I’m not sure if anyone has understood my mangled Japanese. Then they all nod and smile.

Ojiichan ceremoniously pours beer for everyone and raises his glass. “Don-san, it’s good to have you home. *Kanpai!*”

We all drain our glasses, then Obaachan raises hers again. “And I’m glad you missed the ditch this time!”

Editor at large DON GEORGE writes Trip Lit, *Traveler’s* monthly books column online. Photographer MACDUFF EVERTON first visited Japan while hitchhiking around the world at age 18.



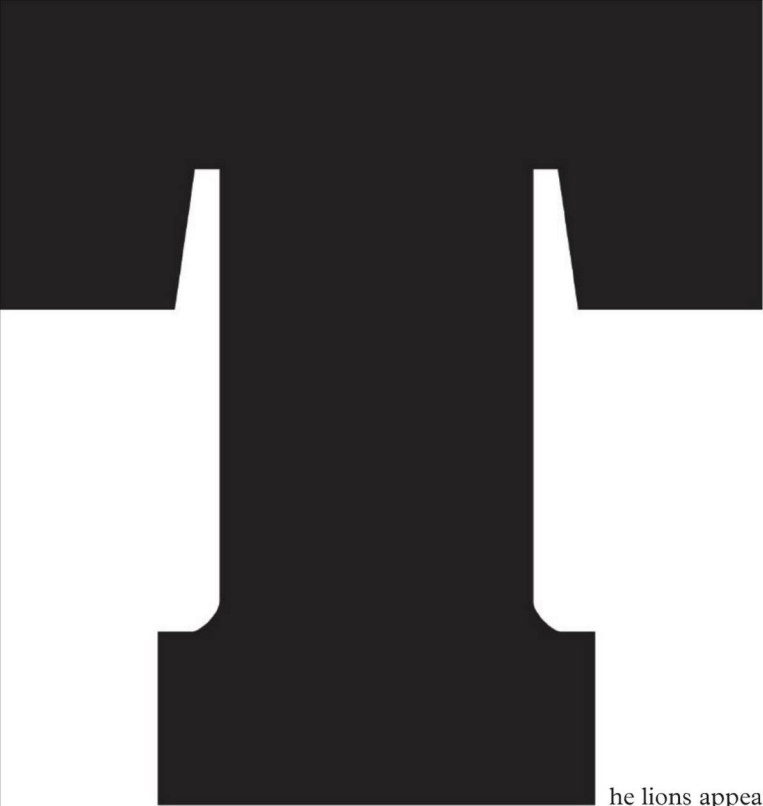
BIG CAT DIARY

AN AFRICAN SAFARI OPENS A FATHER'S EYES
TO THE TRUE NATURE OF LIONS—AND TO
HIS TEENAGE DAUGHTER

BY MARK JENKINS







he lions appear one by one, like ghosts. They are the exact color of the tall, dry grass, a raw sienna. Before we know it, 14 muscled, yellow-eyed great cats have encircled us. They're hunting, but in no hurry. They step forward individually, crouch, hold the position, then move again, their huge paws padding silently in the red dirt. Stealthy as only cats can be, they slip closer and closer. We are not the prey; the pride is stalking a herd of African (or Cape) buffalo.

My 15-year-old daughter, Teal, and I had been driving in a Land Rover along a dirt track through Ruaha National Park, more than 7,000 square miles of reserve in an isolated region in Tanzania's center, when a lion wandered in front of us. It was just past dawn; the sky was violet, the fat baobab trees still black. We shut off the engine, crawled onto the top of the Land Rover, and watched the rising sun bronze the arid bush. Within an hour we were enveloped by the hunting party.

The lions are focused on the African buffalo nearby. Nonetheless, when a large male glances our way, my daughter dives off the roof into the safety of the cab.

"Dad, get in here," she whispers through the cracked window. The sarcasm that normally laces what she says is suddenly gone.

"I'm fine," I reply from the roof.

The lions are assiduously stalking breakfast, and yet their tactics appear indolent. Each animal moves languidly from shaded spot to shaded spot, yawning, closing its eyes. A few even nap in the crouching position (lions will drift into such deep sleep that they'll fall over in slow motion, like a kid in a classroom). But the African buffalo aren't buffaloed; a few lions are always on point, randomly charging the herd. The buffalo have hustled their newborns and yearlings into a group and posted sentries—enormous black beasts with curled horns—along the outer rim. The sentries, square black noses in the air, appear wary but unafraid as they face down the cats: When a lion charges, a sentry meets the attack, lowering its head, thrashing its lethal horns, stomping its hooves—and the lion quickly turns tail.

"Dad, please. They could get you," my daughter says, sounding alarmed.

I haven't heard that tone of voice since Teal was 12 and we were still best friends. We did everything together: rock climbing,

skiing, camping. Then she turned 13 and told me those things were my things, not her things; she hadn't liked them in the first place.

The buffalo herd is large, over a hundred head. It's grazing its way across the savanna, always keeping a phalanx of heavy-skulled bulls turned toward the lions—sleek females and lean adolescent males with small ruffs. The cats are well fed. Ruaha, Tanzania's largest national park, is rich with game, including the largest elephant population in East Africa and vast herds of Grant's gazelles, kudus, and impalas. The lions know they have all day, all week.

Sitting atop the Land Rover, I'm mesmerized by the hunt. Teal unrolls her window just far enough to stick her head out.

"Dad, I'm sorry, okay. Just get back inside."

She thinks I'm acting as she has been acting since we arrived.

Any one of these beasts could spring onto the roof and drag me into the bush—killing a human would be much less work than killing a thousand-pound buffalo—but I know they won't. These lions are unaccustomed to humans. Besides, our Land Rover is an alien creature with undetermined capabilities that they know better than to engage. Rather, the lions, like the buffalo, are enacting a primordial, immutable ritual. Both species are behaving in accordance with their genetic code. Lions have been hunting African buffalo, and African buffalo have been hunted by lions, forever.

"Dad, c'mon!"

"Tealster," I say calmly, invoking the name I'd used when she was a little girl, "it's all right."

I brought Teal with me because I wanted her to see the people I mention when I point out how good her life is. We went to schools where barefoot children walk five miles each way to study in windowless rooms. We stopped in a school where the girls' dorm burned down when two teens studied by candlelight. Twelve girls her age were burned alive. We visited a village where kids herd goats all day, usher them into a thornbush corral at night, and listen for hyenas in their sleep. Teal hasn't complained once.

Last winter, after a snowstorm covered our yard, I'd told her that she'd need to wear boots to school rather than sandals because she might have to walk home in the snow. The next day she wore sandals and walked home in the snow.

There is not a breath of wind on the grassland. The sun has encapsulated our ancient African tableau in silence. The lions are so close, we hear them grooming themselves; the African buffalo are near enough that we can hear their teeth grind as they chew grass.

The young lions taunt the buffalo. Perhaps it's evolutionary protocol. A young lion will charge a massive African buffalo, which then charges back, scaring the lion away. A lone lion can do nothing to an adult African buffalo. Could it be peer pressure that makes adolescents take turns risking their lives? I watch a charging young male get caught by a buffalo hoof and be propelled into the air, like a bucked-off cowboy.

"DAD, PLEASE. THE LIONS COULD GET YOU,"
MY DAUGHTER SAYS WITH ALARM. I HAVE NOT HEARD THAT TONE OF VOICE SINCE TEAL WAS 12 AND WE WERE STILL BEST FRIENDS.

Lion heart: One of Ruaha's gold-maned cats rests before resuming the hunt.



Teal, silent, appears riveted by this mortal game. Then three males hanging around the Land Rover move to sit in the shade of an acacia tree. Teal swiftly rolls up the window.

"Dad, please!" She sounds genuinely scared.

At home, when I ask if a scary film scared her, she looks at me as if I were the stupidest person on the planet.

Of the 14 lions that originally surrounded us, half have now moved on, following the herd. The males and females clearly learn differently. The younger male lions are more aggressive and less thoughtful than the older female lions. The males seem to delight in challenging the African buffalo, running the gantlet. The females wait and watch, move, squat, wait and watch.

I began taking Teal and her older sister, Addi, rock climbing when they were very young. I got them their own kid harnesses. Addi didn't enjoy it and after a while I couldn't even bribe her to go, but Teal kept climbing. She first roped up when she was three years old; by the time she was 12 she had become my little rock-climbing partner. Body alignment, foot placement, these are typically things you need to teach a beginning climber. Not Teal. She rarely exhibited any fear, climbing instinctively, her body position naturally adapting to the requirements of the rock, her feet placed perfectly. It is also normally necessary to teach a person trust: Trust your body, that your hands will hold and your feet will stick. Trust that the rope will hold you if you fall. Trust that your partner will catch you if you fall. Teal never doubted any of this and climbed with ease and elegance.

The only times I saw Teal truly scared were when I would practice falling, and she, as my belayer, had to catch me. She did it but hated it, and told me so.

I lean off the roof of the Land Rover and whisper, "It's okay, honey, really. They're not after me."

"You don't know that! You think you know everything."

I have to grin because she's kind of right.

A lion comes in at an angle, stops directly in front of the Land Rover, stretches out on the warm dirt road on her back, and closes her eyes. I can easily see how wildlife biologists, who spend months, even years, in the field, learn to recognize individual lions through their unique behavior, give them names, become attached, begin to believe they truly understand what a lion thinks.

We had to end naps for Teal and Addi at the same time, when Addi was five and Teal was two and a half, because Teal was staying up until 11 p.m. We'd turn off the light in her room—and she would read out loud to herself for hours. For years she loved reading. Then one day, when I gave her a volume of Jack London stories, she didn't. She said, "I hate reading." I still don't

understand it. We live in the same house but now inhabit different worlds. When our worlds meet, they typically smash into each other, a head-on collision. I then want to talk it out, but my wife says, let it go and the flash point will disappear. So I do, and it does.

The African buffalo are crowding toward a mudhole. The sun is heating up, making the black rocks in the distance shimmer. The lions appear bored; they're dropping away from the herd.

Then, suddenly, a large female lion streaks across the veld. A buffalo calf has somehow ended up on the edge of the main herd. The lioness races through the tall grass, legs stretching in the air in bounding leaps. She is closing in. But just when it looks as if the stalking will pay off, a bull abruptly recognizes what is happening and charges, cutting off the lioness at the last moment.

"I got it on video!" Teal yells up to me, visibly excited.

That is the last act, the morning's coda. We have been watching the play for three hours. The big cats abandon the chase, vanishing into the tall grass as effortlessly as they appeared. The buffalo crowd in at a mudhole. I crawl back into the cab and Teal and I drive away. She is bubbling over with enthusiasm, retelling the adventure in Technicolor, me pitching in details.

The most valuable advice I ever got was from a young mother in our neighborhood. She told me to relax; teenage girls are programmed to ignore their fathers. "Remember that for hundreds of thousands of years, 15-year-old girls were already procreating. It's natural—healthy—that she's pushing you away."

In another three days Teal and I will be back on the coast. We'll take a fishing boat from the port city of Dar es Salaam out to a small island with a burning white beach. Teal will want to sunbathe. I'll get her to play in the water briefly, but then she'll spread out her towel and lie down. I'll stay in the water, splashing about, drifting deeper and deeper.

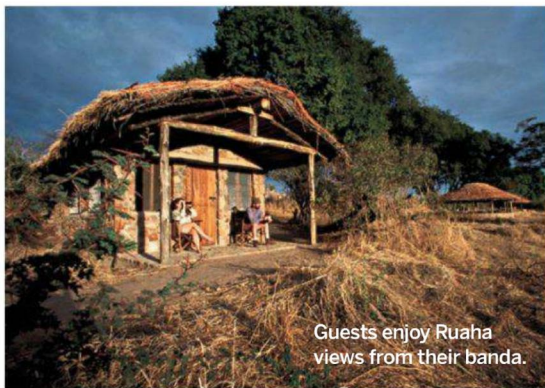
It will become so hot that Teal surely will want to get back in the water. I'll shout for her to join me. She won't turn her face from the sun. I'll bounce to keep my head above water—and suddenly stomp on a sea urchin. The spines will lodge deep in my flesh. I'll thrash to shore yelping, then find some fishermen who will try to pull the spines out with a pair of pliers. They'll find it funny that I'd be stupid enough to go so far offshore. They'll manage to yank out the big spines, but a couple of little ones will break off inside.

One of the fishermen, the color of mahogany, will say, "Hurts, mahn, I know." I'll nod.

The other one will grin. "Bit time, you get over it."

MARK JENKINS also writes for *National Geographic* and *Outside*. His books include *To Timbuktu* and *Off the Map: Bicycling Across Siberia*.

RUAHA NATIONAL PARK, TANZANIA



Exploring Ruaha is unlike visiting any other African game park I've experienced. Far off the tourist track, Ruaha National Park lies in central Tanzania, bounded by the Mzombe River to the north and the Great Ruaha River to the south. At more than 7,500 square miles, it's Tanzania's largest national park and one of the largest ecosystems in East Africa. Its location in the ecological transition zone between southern and eastern Africa means an abundance of animal species, including more than 400 species of birds and eight species of antelopes. These sustain predators, from lions to leopards, cheetahs, jackals, hyenas, and the rare, endangered African dog.

Ruaha sees few visitors, so regulations are simple. Drive up to the gate, pay \$40 for your car and \$20 for each person, and enter. A few lodges exist, but there is more nostalgic charm in camping or renting a government bungalow, or *banda*. In fact, Ruaha is one of the very few African parks where you can see and do it all on your own—perhaps the cheapest safari in the world. We rented a *banda* in the Msembe camp for \$20 but could just as easily have slept in our own tent for less. We cooked for ourselves, drove our own vehicle, and didn't need a guide because animals are everywhere—though we were always mindful that wild animals can be dangerous. —M.J.

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Film Festivals

Park City, Utah, attracts indie film VIPs to red carpets and skiers to empty slopes during Sundance, Jan. 19-29. **San Diego, Calif.**, screens African diaspora and African-American cinema Jan. 26-29. **Berlin** premieres international flicks Feb. 9-19. **Sedona, Ariz.**, stages documentaries, shorts, and comedies Feb. 18-26.

THE SHORT LIST

[A TRAVELER'S CALENDAR]

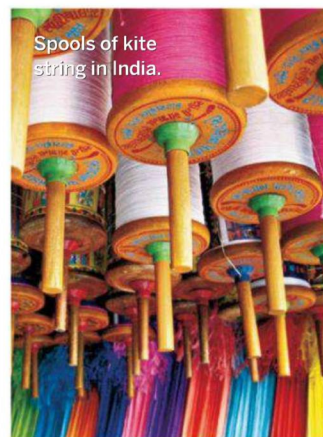


Ice sculptures
in Harbin's Sun
Island Park.

CHINA

Walking in a Winter Wonderland

Jan. 5-Feb. 28 Since the 17th century, Chinese fishermen have carried ice lanterns (made using buckets as molds). Such age-old survivalism meets whimsy during the Harbin Ice and Snow Festival in Heilongjiang Province, located in the frosty upper reaches of northeastern China. (Bundle up: Temps often drop to 20 degrees below zero F—or lower.) In a city made of ice blocks, explore to-scale pagodas and skyscrapers, slide down an ice luge, and watch carving contests and curling tournaments.



Spools of kite
string in India.

INDIA

Kites With Might

Jan. 14 Kites soar in India's western state of Gujarat on the Hindu holiday Uttarayan, when winter starts to turn to spring. Rooftops turn into launching pads both day and night (using illuminated box kites). The competition to knock down each other's kites can be risky—the *manja* (string) sold for them at Ahmadabad's Patang Bazaar comes laced with glass.

SPAIN

The Beat Goes On

Jan. 20 La Tamborrada cues a midnight-to-midnight drum session in honor of San Sebastián's patron saint and, some say, in a throwback to 19th-century maids who tapped on buckets while at the city's well. Join the racket with a drum kit from a restaurant near the central plaza.

FLORIDA

High Rollers

Jan. 22 On this date 100 years ago, the first train on Henry Flagler's Over-Sea Railroad rolled from the Florida mainland all the way to Key West, connecting formerly isolated islands. Fete the engineering feat—then dubbed the “Eighth Wonder of the World”—at a Key West parade chugging down Duval Street to the Custom House.

RYAN MCVAY/GETTY IMAGES (FILM REEL), MEENA KADRI (SPOOLS), PIERRE BESSARD/REA/REUX (SCULPTURE)



MEXICO

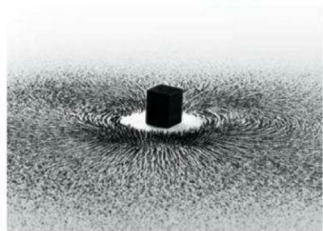
Something to Tweet About

Jan. 29–Feb. 5 “A paradise for birders,” boasts birding guide Mark Stackhouse about San Blas, a 17th-century fishing village on the Pacific. During the Festival of Migratory Birds, stay at the Hotel Garza Canela, a base for boat tours through a mangrove swamp to spot kingfishers as well as cruises to a volcanic islet where blue-footed boobies (*left*) teach their chicks to fly. At night, more wildlife roars in the square.

LONDON

To Mecca

Jan. 26–April 15 In the British Museum’s exhibition “Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam,” an etching by artist Ahmed Mater shows iron filings swirling around a cube-shaped magnet (*below*). The piece alludes to hajj (effort), the tradition that pulls three million Muslims toward Mecca each year. With Britain’s burgeoning Muslim population, it’s an apt time to delve into this spiritual duty practiced since the seventh century. Also on view: textiles from Mecca’s Kaaba (Islam’s most sacred shrine) and personal testimonials.



STRANGE PLANET

Leap Day

Each February 29, “leaplings” descend on Anthony, the self-claimed Leap Year capital straddling the borders of Texas and New Mexico along the Rio Grande. The once-every-four-years bash features a parade and birthday cake. Over in Ireland, lovesick women are “allowed” to buck tradition and propose marriage on this day, according to a fifth-century legend.

LAS VEGAS

Mobbing the Museum

Feb. 14 The latest vice put on display in Sin City: downtown’s Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement (aka the Mob Museum), in the town where Bugsy Siegel earned notoriety in the 1940s. Inside the former courthouse that hosted organized-crime hearings in 1950, you can interpret coded conversations, examine surveillance footage, and learn about the “Black Book” of casino crooks.



Colombia's Barranquilla Carnival.

AUSTRALIA

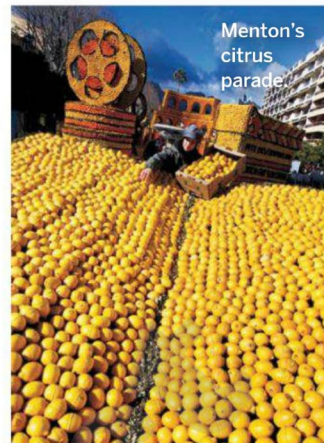
Surf's Up Down Under

Feb. 11–19 Riding the waves has been a way of life in Australia since a Hawaiian Olympian introduced the sport here in the early 20th century. Known as the country’s birthplace of surfing, Sydney’s Manly Beach—site of the 1964 World Surfing Championships and hometown of legendary surfers Barton Lynch and Layne Beachley—celebrates wave chasing at the nine-day, inaugural Australian Open of Surfing. Immerse yourself in beach culture, from skating demos to art shows, and look for plaques on the boardwalk honoring Manly Olympians.

OREGON

Sonnets From the Sea

Feb. 24–26 In historic Astoria on the Columbia River, fishing boats heave with salmon—and poems. The Fisher Poets Gathering, in its 15th year, convenes folks to bust rhymes, from salty sailor talk to emotive free verse.



Menton's citrus parade.

FRANCE

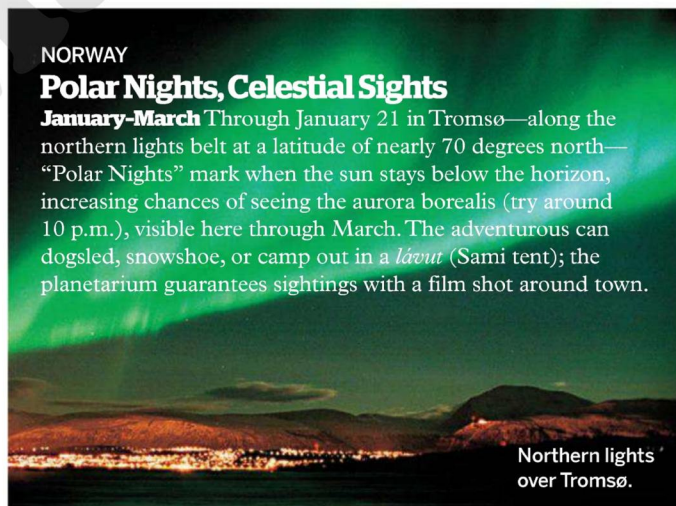
Lemon Love

Feb. 17–March 7 Give Menton a lemon... and it makes the Fête du Citron. The Côte d’Azur’s “lemon capital” flaunts its own sugary, sorbet-perfect citrus. Sundays, parade floats are piled high with lemons and oranges in wild shapes like dragons and dinosaurs. At the nearby Palais Carnolès, where Monaco royalty once summered, stroll among 100-plus citrus tree varieties.

NORWAY

Polar Nights, Celestial Sights

January–March Through January 21 in Tromsø—along the northern lights belt at a latitude of nearly 70 degrees north—“Polar Nights” mark when the sun stays below the horizon, increasing chances of seeing the aurora borealis (try around 10 p.m.), visible here through March. The adventurous can dogsled, snowshoe, or camp out in a *lávut* (Sami tent); the planetarium guarantees sightings with a film shot around town.



Northern lights over Tromsø.

Crazy for Carnivals

Pre-Lent days (Feb. 18–21) inspire quirky traditions. **Colombia**’s Carnaval de Barranquilla, with a “battle” of flowers, fuses European, African, and Caribbean cultures. Oranges are the ammo (in an organized fruit fight) at Ivrea, **Italy**’s Battaglia delle Arance and at **Belgium**’s Carnaval de Binche, when they’re meant as gifts. (Tip: Don’t retaliate against the Gilles, who wear red, yellow, and black costumes.) **Croatia**’s Rijeka Carnival leads up to the burning of the *pust* doll (a symbol of past bad luck). Dancers clad as devils swarm **Bolivia** during the Oruro Carnival.

Reported by Diane Bair, Alison Brick, Juliana Gilling, Jeannette Kimmel, and Katie Knorovsky.



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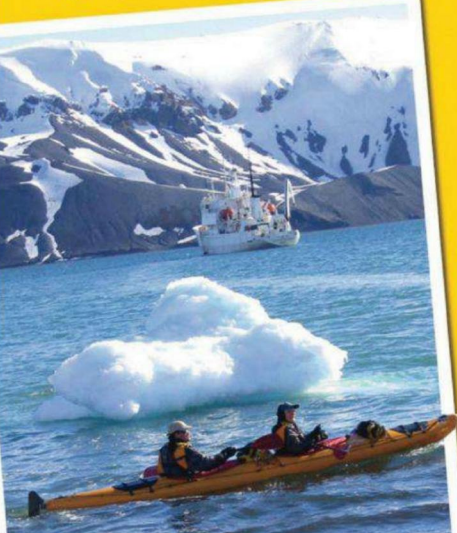
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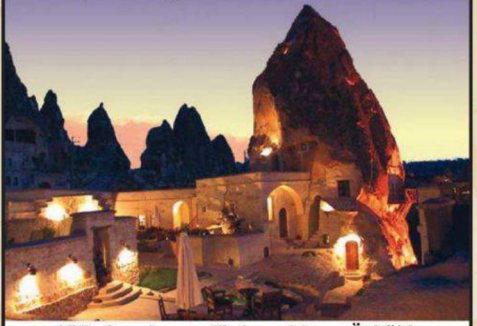
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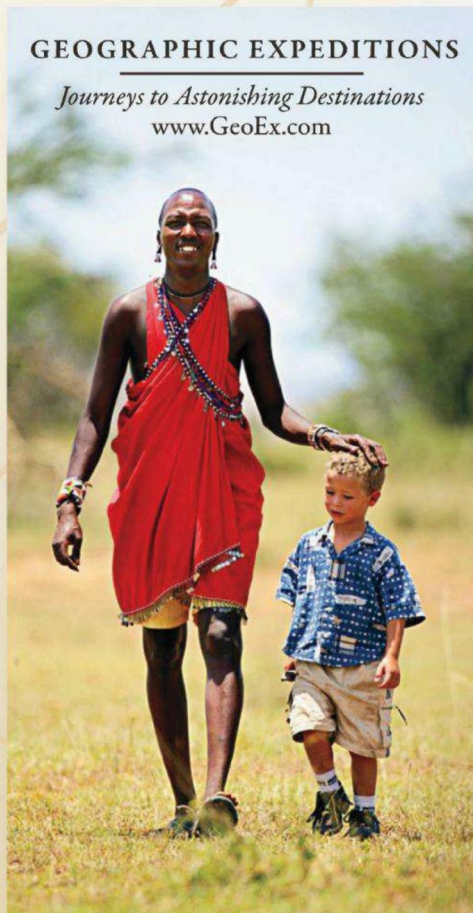
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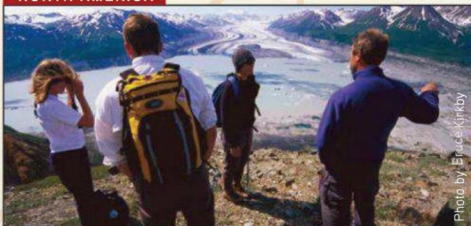
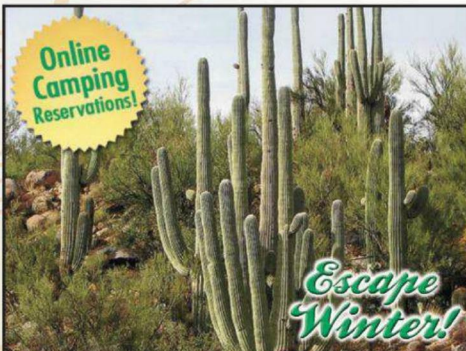


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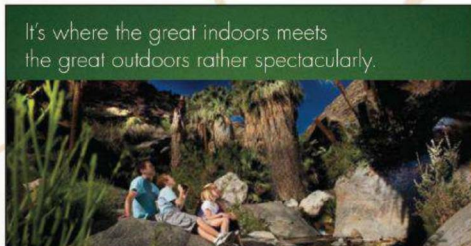
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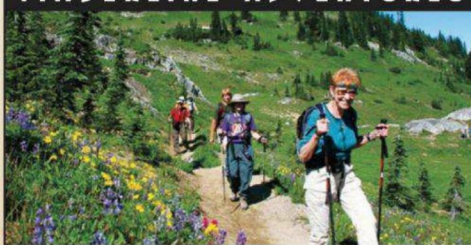
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Nice Day for White Sledding

Photograph and text by **LOLA AKINMADE-ÅKERSTRÖM**

Lake Stor-Skabram, Sweden

LAST FEBRUARY, I visited the market and festival of the indigenous Sami reindeer herders, held since 1605 in Jokkmokk, a part of Swedish Lapland. Historically, visitors traveled to the market on skis and *akkja* (sleds) pulled by reindeer. Inspired by the Sami, I felt drawn to connect with the landscape. So early one morning, I tagged along with a local dogsledding outfitter and some three dozen Siberian huskies on an invigorating journey traversing frozen Lake Stor-Skabram and its surroundings. We rode past a small igloo village and through scanty woods; we stopped to roast sausages (*korv*) over an open flame. We discovered nature at its best—listening to the sleds crushing through snow, the rhythmic panting of the huskies, and the slow whistle of cold air. Completely trusting the environment made this remote place feel special, from the crisp subarctic air to reindeer scrambling across the panorama. In this photo, I love how the red-orange backpack contrasts sharply with the white that enveloped us.

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